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ABSTRACT

Auspicing in Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector involves organizations entering into partnerships with registered training organizations (RTOs) to have the training and assessment they undertake recognized under the National Training Framework. RTOs bear responsibility for assuring the quality of the assessments conducted by other organizations and for issuing the qualifications and/or statements of attainment that ensue from the training. A sample of auspiced assessment arrangements was subjected to a comprehensive examination that included a review of the national and international literature on partnerships and case studies of 6 sites across Australia. Although the case study organizations used various strategies to assure the quality of assessments conducted on their behalf, they all generally covered the following facets of the assessment process: (1) selection, training, and ongoing professional development of assessors; (2) development of resources to support the conduct of assessment; (3) information on assessment for assessors and candidates; and (4) verification and validation strategies. Appendixes constituting approximately 60% of the document contain the following items: the study methodology; case studies; profiles of VET-in-Schools programs; a preliminary negotiation flowchart; research documentation; and a list of key informants to the research. (Contains 7 tables and 37 references.) (MN)

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Partnerships in assessment

Auspicating in action

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- Australian Environmental Pest Managers' Association, Peter Meadows Consulting and CIT Solutions, Canberra Institute of Technology.

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Executive summary

Background

Auspicing in the vocational education and training (VET) sector involves an organisation entering into partnership with a registered training organisation (RTO) in order to have the training and assessment that it undertakes recognised under the National Training Framework. In such an arrangement, the RTO has responsibility for assuring the quality of the assessments conducted by the other organisation. Thus, the RTO is required to set up systems for monitoring and evaluating assessment processes and judgements about competence. The RTO is also responsible for issuing the qualifications and/or statements of attainment that ensue from that training.

The concept of auspicing in VET in Australia stems from the Australian Recognition Framework (ARF) (ANTA 1999). Section 5.1 of the National Assessment Principles states that any assessment for national recognition purposes should be undertaken by, or auspiced through, a registered training organisation.

With the revision and re-labelling of the ARF to the Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF), the term 'auspicing' has been replaced by the term 'partnerships' and the compliance requirements attached to such relationships have been strengthened considerably. Partnership arrangements must be supported by a formal agreement and an RTO must maintain a register of all written agreements with other organisations which conduct training and/or assessment on its behalf. As with any vocational education and training assessment for recognition purposes, the RTO must also establish quality assurance strategies to ensure the processes and outcomes are valid, consistent and fair.

Purpose of study

The purpose of this study was to undertake a comprehensive examination of a sample of auspiced assessment arrangements. This included:

- a review of national and international literature on partnerships, as well as a desk audit of VET-in-Schools partnership resources
- a descriptive case-study approach designed to examine aspects of assessment partnerships involving auspicing.

Six case-study sites were selected for in-depth examination. They were:

- Cargill Foods Australia (Wagga Wagga) and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (Meat processing), an example of a range of partnerships with enterprises and the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) in all Australian states
- Santos (Queensland) and Eastern Gippsland Institute of TAFE (Petrochemicals), an example of a cross-border initiative
- Kilmany Family Care (Bairnsdale) and University of Ballarat (Children's Services), an example of a remote Aboriginal community training partnership
- National Foods and Goulbourn–Ovens Institute of TAFE (Food processing), an example of auspicing on one site for a large national enterprise
- NSW Department of Housing, Sydney Institute of TAFE and Canberra Institute of Technology, an example of a large government department working with two large RTOs delivering a range of assessment services

- Australian Environmental Pest Managers' Association, Peter Meadows Consulting and Canberra Institute of Technology, a partnership blending an industry association, a pest management technical expert and a large RTO to assess staff in pest management enterprises across Australia for licensing purposes.

In addition, a desk audit of arrangements used by school-based VET providers of training was also undertaken.

Findings

The research revealed considerable evidence about the extent of auspicing in VET in Australia. More than twenty industry areas were identified on advice from national and state industry training advisory bodies (ITABs), licensing bodies, industry associations and unions. These identified partnerships involving multinational companies, small business, unions, consultants and industry associations working with public and private RTOs to have their training recognised and the skills of their workers acknowledged under the Australian Qualifications Framework.

At the same time partnerships in assessments are being utilised by school-based VET providers of training. National and state education policies encourage partnerships for the delivery of VET-in-Schools programs. These are seen to be a sensible way of utilising human and physical resources. Given the varying nature of the approaches taken by individual states and territories, a comparative analysis was not undertaken; however, the appendices do include a summary of VET-in-Schools models and some detail regarding supporting documentation used in some states and territories. In South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia, guidelines, checklists, templates and proformas to support the establishment of collaborative arrangements can be accessed through the internet.

Models of partnership arrangements

There is a variety of possible partnership arrangements models. These differ according to which partner has responsibility for developing the assessment tools, collecting the evidence and making the assessment judgements (see table 1).

The cases included in this study involve a mix of models. In four cases, the RTOs and partners have worked very closely together on the development of assessment tools. Partner organisations, in most instances, are also largely responsible for evidence collection and making the judgements about the achievement of competence. In the area of quality assurance, most partner organisations have been actively involved in determining which strategies to employ, and these have been built into the quality management systems of the partner organisations.

Regardless of the model, the case studies demonstrated the AQTF requirement that the RTO partner must always be responsible for quality-assuring the assessments conducted on their behalf and for issuing the associated Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) qualifications or statements of attainment.

Impetus for collaboration

In five of the six cases examined, the non-registered organisations initiated the partnerships by requesting training and assessment services from the RTOs. All wanted their training and the skills of their workers recognised under the AQF, but did not wish to become RTOs themselves. The services they wanted could be purchased from the RTOs thus allowing them to get on with their core business. This is an approach that is confirmed by the literature on partnerships.

Other forces that have provided the impetus for collaboration have been regulations and licensing (food processing, meat processing and pest management) and new enterprise bargaining agreements (petrochemicals, food processing, meat processing and property management). ITABs have also been influential, as have the creative and flexible individuals in all of the organisations

who have driven the partnerships forward. The important role of 'torch bearers' in developing effective alliances is a factor also acknowledged in the literature.

Target audience and scope of qualifications

In all but one case, the training and assessment delivered under the partnership arrangement is for both entry to the industry and the existing workforce in each enterprise. While Certificates in Pest Management are delivered totally on the job, the Diploma of Community Services (Childcare) is undertaken off the job. The training in the other partnerships is a mix of both. The qualifications being delivered across the partnerships range from certificate 1 through to diploma level. However, there was no apparent difference in the way auspicing was managed across AQF levels.

Formal documentation

The formal documentation underpinning the relationships ranges from a simple letter of agreement for meat processing to highly detailed contracts or memorandums of understanding for the other partnerships. It is apparent that the more costly the activity being undertaken in monetary or risk terms, the more detailed the written agreement.

Quality assurance strategies

In all six partnerships, RTOs used a number of strategies to quality-assure the assessments conducted on their behalf, but they generally covered the following facets of the assessment process:

- the selection, training and ongoing professional development of assessors
- the development of resources to support the conduct of assessment, including an assessment policy, assessment procedures, assessment tools, evidence collection guidelines and exemplars
- information on assessment for assessors and candidates
- verification and validation strategies, including strategies for team assessment and sampling.

The choices that partners made about assuring the quality of their assessment were influenced by the degree of risk placed on the assessments in high-risk worksites, the amount of time and money available for quality assurance and the geographical proximity of the partners. In four cases, assessors and the candidates were dispersed and assessors rarely had the opportunity to get together to discuss assessment or review processes and the decisions they had made. To ensure validity and reliability, the emphasis placed on up-front quality information was therefore quite important. Printed information and guidelines provided up-front were judged to be the best method for gaining consistency in processes and outcomes when large numbers of assessors and candidates were involved.

In all cases, considerable emphasis was also placed on the selection and training of assessors. Usually undertaken by the RTO partner in the early stages of collaboration, assessor training and ongoing professional development form the crucial components in the quality assurance strategies supporting all partnerships.

Expectations and experiences

Informants to the study reflected on their expectations and experiences in their partnership arrangements. They shared their views on skill development and skill deficits, their strategies for support and areas for improvement, and the benefits to themselves and their organisations gained from their involvement in the partnership.

In general, all informants in all cases reflected favourably on their partnerships. For the enterprises in the six cases, the alliances have been beneficial to the successful implementation of training and assessment in their workplaces. For the RTOs, the major benefits have been increased services to industry, an enhanced profile and the establishment of networks facilitating other alliances and projects, and the broadening of the skills and industry knowledge of RTO staff.

Critical elements in partnerships

The informants' views supported the findings of the Australian and international literature that there are critical factors common to the development and continuation of effective collaborative alliances such as these auspiced arrangements. These factors include a willingness to collaborate, a shared vision of what might be achieved, respect and trust and good communication. Equally important are effective and respected leadership, an acceptance of differing cultures, flexibility and a willingness to take risks and develop new skills and mindsets.

Guidelines for partnerships in assessment

Both the literature and the information gathered in the field in this study identify a number of critical aspects which need to be addressed in the establishment and maintenance of partnerships. In particular, these aspects are:

- the importance of preliminary negotiations and the clarification of services covered by the arrangements
- the requirement to comply with the *Australian Qualifications Training Framework standards for registered training organisations* (ANTA 2001) such as:
  - a formal agreement
  - a register
  - quality assurance arrangements
- the maintenance and review of such partnerships.

The guidelines presented in this report address all of these aspects.

Introduction

A number of possibilities or models for partnerships in assessment can be found in the current Australian vocational education and training (VET) environment. However, a brief examination of various databases indicates that there is little literature, research, examples or other material that would provide information for registered training organisations (RTOs) and enterprises interested in establishing auspiced assessment arrangements. Given the lack of policy, guidelines or any extensive information about models, strategies and approaches to partnerships in assessment, this study was seen as an opportunity to explore a number of auspiced assessment arrangements in action in the VET environment.

The Australian Recognition Framework (ANTA 1999) outlines the concept of auspiced assessment, but provides no definition or further supporting information about the process. The clearest definition available is that provided in 2000 by Lyndon Shea in a presentation on behalf of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) to the ACT Providers' Forum. In it he stated:

> *Auspicing in vocational education means an organisation can carry out training and/or assessment activities on behalf of another organisation, where the organisation auspicing is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), and the group auspiced is not. It will often occur in partnerships between an RTO and an enterprise, but may also entail agreements between training organisations.*

However, the term 'auspicing' appears not to be commonly used or commonly understood in the VET sector. Partnerships, collaborations and alliances are terms that are more commonly used. For the purpose of this study, these words are used interchangeably. The key feature of this type of partnership is that the registered training organisation is responsible for the quality assurance of the assessments conducted on their behalf and the issuing of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications and/or statements of attainment. Thus, the responsibility for the integrity of the outcomes of assessment rests with the RTO.

All RTO assessments must be conducted in accordance with the Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF) standards and the quality assurance arrangements in place in the particular state/territory. Formal partnership arrangements, therefore, must specify the minimum quality assurance measures that must be met to ensure that the assessment outcome will be recognised by the RTO.

What the literature says

Entering into partnerships: Impetus for collaboration

The major reason for entering into a strategic alliance or partnership is that it allows an organisation to 'farm out' activities to the most efficient supplier, while keeping for itself those activities which represent core business (Limerick & Cunnington 1993; Phan & Peridis 2000).

Limerick and Cunnington also suggest that such partnerships offer organisations opportunities for:

- focussing on the development of the unit's own distinctive competencies
- sharing expertise, competencies and best practice
- reducing costs, by achieving economies of scale, efficiencies and using the distinctive competencies of other units
- innovating, by bringing together different technologies and approaches to form new goods and services
- market synergies, in the form of new markets, shared distribution channels, promotion activities and the like.

These are all aspects that are equally attractive for those entering into education–business alliances. Just as with businesses, partnership implies a formal agreement to work toward shared goals and to benefit from mutual investments. In an educational setting, the formal agreement is established to achieve particular educational outcomes (Epstein 1992; Butcher 1998). More importantly, perhaps, such partnerships make possible innovative undertakings that would be inconceivable for individual organisations on their own (Bergquist, Betwee & Meuel 1995).

Lankard (1995) notes the increasing participation of educational institutions and business in partnerships in the United States since the mid-1980s and suggests that these collaborative relationships were traditionally perceived to benefit only education. More recently, however, such alliances have also been seen to be of benefit to business. Companies such as Motorola, General Motors, Boeing and Honeywell are working closely with community colleges and other educational institutions to build the skills of their workforces.

In addition, because training in the United States is highly decentralised, training partnerships tend to be market-driven and dynamic and fluid in nature. Alliances are generated between training providers and individual enterprises or groups of firms drawn from the local training networks. Through these networks, employers are able to secure training services that directly address their particular training needs at the time that they particularly need them (Mitchell 1998).

> *When businesses engage in collaborative partnerships, they look for benefits that affect their operation, productivity, and profit-line elements that enable them to be competitive in a changing society. Such benefits as improved public relations, better entry-level employees, decreased training costs, increased productivity, and heightened potential for local economic development will affect their 'bottom line'.* (Lankard 1995, p.2)

Characteristics of effective partnerships

A great deal of literature is available on factors believed to be influential in the development of successful partnerships, particularly in relation to partnerships in business or collaboration by community agencies. Regardless of the focus, there are common factors that have been determined to be critical in the development and maintenance of effective partnerships. These are discussed below.

A willingness to collaborate

Alter and Hage (1993) propose that a significant pre-condition for any partnership is the willingness of an organisation to enter into a collaborative relationship. Self-interest is seen as a major influence in the development of this willingness (Smith & Betts 2000; Partnerships Online 2000; Wakelin 1995).

> *Willingness starts, of course, from an awareness and understanding of other organizations' needs and the perception that they are in some way compatible with one's own. Likewise, organizational members must be aware that collaboration will result in what we call adaptive efficiency.*
>
> (Alter & Hage 1993, p.39)

Therefore, for a collaborative relationship to be successful, there must be a sense from the beginning, that the proposed alliance will provide positive organisational returns to all of the partners.

A shared vision of what might be achieved, including a set of agreed goals

Research into a small number of business-school-based projects involving university, business school and business partnerships funded by the Department for Education and Employment in the United Kingdom found that there are specific factors which favour the development of effective alliances (SME-Learning 2001). Having a mutual understanding of what can be attained by working collaboratively, as well as a clear set of project goals, are seen as crucial to success. Part of this concept of a shared vision also includes having clearly defined expectations of all partners and the equitable distribution of both rights and responsibilities (Ballen & Moles 1994; Bergquist, Betwee & Meuel 1995; Butcher 1998).

While there is a requirement for partners to have a common view of where they wish to go, Alter and Hage put forward the idea that collaborative partnerships can be both more intense and stable among organisations from different sectors. If partners bring complementary rather than similar technologies to the alliance, they are more likely to form symbiotic relationships. 'Absent of the natural antagonisms of competitors, symbiotic relationships tend to have a greater frequency of interaction' (Astley & Fombrun 1983, p.578).

Respect and trust

Respect and trust are rated throughout the literature as critically important in the development of effective partnerships, regardless of the context in which they are formed. Partners are dependent upon each other and the achievement of shared goals can only be attained if partners feel a strong sense of trust in each other (Ballen & Moles 1994; Child & Faulkner 1998).

Good communication

Like trust, effective and frequent communication between partners is identified as an essential factor in the establishment and maintenance of collaborative relationships.

> *Inter-institutional agreements can be made but they can be killed by a lack of communication within the organization. Partners should then be aware about the importance of sharing information and stimulating discussions about the collaboration in order to inform people from their institution about outside collaboration and get their assent.* (Savoie-Zajc & Dolbec 1999)

An emphasis on strong communication channels is particularly crucial in organisations where lines of communication are generally governed by hierarchical structures (Bergquist, Betwee & Meuel 1995).

Effective and respected leadership

In a large study of partnerships in the United States in the early 1990s, Bergquist, Betwee and Meuel (1995) gathered information from existing case studies in the literature while undertaking a large number of their own. They found that leadership at all levels within every company involved in a partnership was an essential determinant of success. Leaders in effective partnerships were identified as being able to provide strategic, tactical, operational, interpersonal, and cultural integration.

An acceptance of differing cultures

Cultural differences between organisations can have considerable impact on the success or failure of a partnership. Differences in cultural styles lead to differences in the process of management. There can be considerable cultural differences in the ways organisations go about planning, organising, making decisions and communicating. Sensitivity to each other's cultures is vital to successful joint operation (Hall 1995; Child & Faulkner 1998).

Flexibility and a willingness to take risks

To make partnerships work, it is important to develop a simple, yet sustainable, quality process flexible enough to allow for plenty of creativity and imagination, yet providing the structure for measurement and reproducibility (Lendrum 2000). Butcher (1998) confirms that for alliances to be effective, participants involved in the collaborative activities cannot be constrained by narrow performance and accountability procedures and rigid bureaucratic processes as time is at a premium and flexible decision-making is crucial. At the same time, there is a need to be prepared to take risks and accept challenges to achieve the goals of the partnership. There is a close connection between a willingness to take risks and having a sense of trust in those involved in the partnership (Bergquist, Betwee & Meuel 1995).

New skills and mindsets

Successful collaboration requires the development of new skills, mindsets and corporate architectures. Further, effective collaborative relationships require a change in thinking: what Kerka (1997) calls an ability to see the 'big picture'; and in operating, a modification of structures, policies, and rules to make service delivery seamless (Kerka 1997).

Australian VET policy on auspiced assessment

In a presentation to the Australian National Training Authority annual conference, Noonan (1998) noted the need to encourage the building of collaborative partnerships between RTOs and enterprises so that 'the workplace assessment and delivery pathway becomes a significant means by which the existing workforce develops, and has recognised, new skills'. Auspiced assessment arrangements are one form of collaboration in the VET sector.

The concept of auspiced assessment had its foundation in the National Assessment Principles that form part of the Australian Recognition Framework (ANTA 1999). Principle 5 of that framework states, 'Assessment should be undertaken by, or auspiced through, a Registered Training Organisation'. Thus, only registered training organisations are authorised to certify the outcomes of vocational education and training and issue VET qualifications under the Australian Qualifications Framework.

Some explanation of the concept of auspicing is provided in the report of the Framing the Future project undertaken by Enterprise Design Associates in Tasmania in association with the Tasmanian Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services (TasWRAPS) ITAB in 1997–98. Here it is suggested:

> *The term 'auspiced assessment' is used to describe a partnership arrangement in which a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) issues qualifications based on assessments conducted by workplace personnel. The auspiced assessment arrangement is underpinned by on the job learning. RTO's [sic] have an arms length relationship both with the workplace assessors who operate under their registration, and with the employers and candidates who are their clients.*
>
> (Enterprise Design Associates 1998, p.3)

The nature of the partnership arrangement and the role of the RTO are further clarified in the following definition. Auspicing arrangements are:

> *Formal arrangements which enable Registered Training Organisations to provide recognition for the outcomes of assessments conducted by non-registered organisations. Such agreements specify the minimum quality assurance measures that must be met to ensure that the assessment outcome will be recognised by the Registered Training Organisation.* (Curriculum Corporation 1999)

It is apparent from these definitions that an auspiced assessment arrangement is deemed to be a formal relationship between a non-registered provider of training and an RTO and that such formalisation is achieved through a written agreement.

Auspiced arrangements: The documentation of agreements

In the constantly changing environment characterising vocational education and training in Australia, the revision of the Australian Recognition Framework standards for registered training organisations further impacts upon the issue. The AQTF standards for RTOs (ANTA 2001) notes that organisations may enter into an agreement with an RTO to deliver nationally recognised training or assessment services on behalf of the RTO and the RTO will be responsible for compliance with ARF for those services.

These standards no longer mention the term 'auspiced', but do give clearer explanation of the process for formalising partnerships. Standard 1.6 notes:

> *(a) The RTO must have and comply with, a written agreement with each organisation that provides training and/or assessment on behalf of the RTO.*
>
> *(b) The agreement must specify how each party to the agreement will discharge its responsibilities for compliance with the ARF Standards for Registered Training Organisations.*
>
> *(c) The RTO must maintain a register of all agreements made under subsection 1.6 (a)*
>
> (ANTA 2001)

Although the Enterprise Design Associates 1997–98 Framing the Future project produced a comprehensive model agreement for an auspiced assessment system, there appear to be very few other examples available that address partnerships in the broader VET environment. Detailed systemic or institutional policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of formal partnership agreements have yet to be developed.

In marked contrast, there have been extensive supporting information, guidelines and exemplar agreements for auspiced arrangements developed by a number of the state regulatory authorities in relation to VET-in-Schools programs. For example, in South Australia, VET-in-Schools agreements (VISAs) are backed up by an operations manual for staff in schools and TAFE institutions (DETE 1999). This manual covers the establishment of agreements, details the quality assurance requirements and provides examples of the relevant documentation required to formalise such relationships.

Western Australian authorities have also put together a set of guidelines for the development of partnership arrangements which outline the benefits of collaboration, identify the roles and responsibilities of key players and offer some suggestions for partnership models (Government of Western Australia 1998). It should be noted, however, that recent policy changes in Western Australia have altered auspiced arrangements with regard to VET-in-Schools programs. Despite these changes, the 1998 guidelines provide a useful reference for others seeking to enter into such arrangements.

In Victoria, information and resources for VET-in-Schools programs are presented through VISNET (Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria 2000). The website supplies not only strategies for developing school–RTO partnerships but also provides several sample memorandums of understanding.

Research into assessment partnerships and auspiced arrangements in VET

There is minimal research material available in Australian VET literature that addresses collaborative partnerships involving auspicing. Enterprise Design Associates, in their 1998 Framing the Future project, developed an example of an auspiced assessment agreement for small business, while other educational organisations have produced supporting material and research which assists personnel generate more general partnerships (Victoria University, Centre for Workplace Culture Change 1999).

The Access Educational Services Division of TAFE NSW has formulated advice for staff of TAFE institutions and Educational Service Divisions who are entering into assessment partnerships (Access Educational Services Division 1999). The advice covers some basic strategies for negotiating partnerships, including preparing for partnering, what should be included in an agreement and what co-ordination may be required. Guidelines are also provided for implementing assessment arrangements and for quality assuring the assessment processes and outcomes. While emphasising the regulatory requirement for quality assurance, it is also noted:

> *... it is essential for TAFE to maintain the standards of its awards and their status in industry and the community. Therefore, quality assurance mechanisms to support Institute assessment relationships underpin the quality outcomes for learners, enterprise supervisors and assessors, the employer and TAFE NSW.* (Access Educational Services Division 1999, p.3)

Also in New South Wales, the Manufacturing and Engineering Educational Services Division of TAFE NSW undertook a pilot program on partnerships in the process industries with Manufacturing Learning Australia and the NSW Process Manufacturing Industry Training Board. The report on this pilot notes some key outcomes for both industry and TAFE (Manufacturing and Engineering Educational Services Division 1998).

From a national perspective, consistency in competency-based assessment has been the focus of a strategic evaluation undertaken for the Australian National Training Authority in 2000 (ANTA 2000a). The potential for inconsistencies in assessment approaches and the quality of assessment decisions in auspiced arrangements were issues raised in this study. As a result, the evaluators made two recommendations to address the concerns. The first encourages a review of the skills and knowledge requirements for RTO personnel involved in these types of collaborative relationships, while the second suggests that the audit mechanisms of state training authorities be reviewed to ensure that they effectively monitor auspiced arrangements (ANTA 2000a). A follow-on study also undertaken for ANTA made a further recommendation that resources be put together to assist those developing or entering into these arrangements (ANTA 2000b).

In parallel with the development of support resources for partnership arrangements in assessment, the new AQTF standards for RTOs (ANTA 2001) formalised the requirements for RTOs entering

into a partnership with another organisation to deliver nationally recognised training or assessment services on behalf of the RTO. Under these requirements RTOs must:

- have and comply with a written agreement with each organisation that provides training and/or assessment on their behalf
- maintain a register of such agreements
- take responsibility for the agreed quality assurance strategies.

The AQTF standards for RTOs (ANTA 2001) also address the requirements for RTOs to quality-assure their assessments. These standards clearly cover assessments conducted on their behalf.

> *1.4 (a): The RTO must conduct an internal audit* of its compliance with these Standards and the policies and procedures in 1.1(a) at least annually. (*Alternatively the RTO may conduct self-assessments of equivalent rigour.)*
>
> *9.2: The RTO must validate its assessment strategies by:*
>
> *a) reviewing, comparing and evaluating the assessment processes, tools and evidence contributing to judgements made by a range of assessors against the same competency standards, at least annually; and*
>
> *b) documenting any action taken to improve the quality and consistency of assessment.*
>
> (ANTA 2001)

These quality assurance strategies of audit and validation could be considered the minimum quality assurance that should be employed by an RTO to quality-assure its assessments.

There are various possible models of partnership arrangements between RTOs and other organisations. The variations in the models can best be understood by working out which organisation is responsible for each aspect within the assessment and reporting process.

Therefore the variations in the partnership models depend on who has responsibility for:

- quality-assuring the assessments
- developing the assessment tools
- collecting the evidence
- making the judgement
- issuing the AQF qualifications and/or statement(s) of attainment.

However, within partnership arrangements such as these, the RTO is always responsible for:

- quality-assuring the assessments conducted on their behalf
- issuing the AQF qualifications and/or statement(s) of attainment.

Therefore, the other operations within the assessment and reporting process can be the responsibility of either the RTO or the partner organisation or both. Consequently there are three major possible partnership arrangements within which assessments are conducted on behalf of the RTO.

Table 1: Partnership arrangement models and responsibilities

Model	Quality assurance	Assessment tools	Evidence	Judgement	Qualification
A	RTO	RTO	Partner	Partner	RTO
B	RTO	Partner	Partner	Partner	RTO
C	RTO	RTO/Partner	RTO/Partner	RTO/Partner	RTO

Source: Adapted from DETYA (2001)

In summary, partnership arrangements for assessment purposes are increasingly becoming a feature of vocational education and training in Australia. Non-registered enterprises that wish to have the training they provide to their employees formally recognised are entering into collaborative arrangements with RTOs.

From both the enterprise and RTO perspectives there is considerable value in such relationships; however, working together requires partners to have a shared view of what is to be achieved and a strong sense of mutual trust. Furthermore, they need to acknowledge their cultural differences and communicate openly and effectively, while being prepared to be flexible and look at their worlds in a different way.

With significant changes being made in the Australian Qualifications Training Framework, RTOs will now need to develop more stringent policies and procedures for partnership arrangements. Formal agreements, the maintenance of a register and the careful monitoring of the quality of both the process and the outcomes of the assessment will be required. For the partners in these arrangements, there will now need to be a careful balance between ensuring compliance with the auditing requirements of the AQTF and achieving the positive outcomes that can ensue from partnerships in assessment.

A synopsis of auspiced assessment arrangements

The first goal of this study was to investigate the approaches and arrangements being used by a small number of organisations entering into partnership arrangements for assessment purposes. However, in undertaking the examination, a good deal of information was gathered about the extent and nature of auspicing in the Australian VET environment.

Details of examples were most readily available from key industry stakeholders who are playing significant roles in encouraging, establishing and maintaining auspiced arrangements. Many representatives from national and state industry training advisory bodies, national regulators and licensing bodies, industry associations and unions were able to identify instances of auspicing in action.

During the period of the study, partnerships in assessment involving auspicing were identified in the following industry areas:

Drilling	Petrochemicals	Meat processing
Pulp and paper	Metalliferous mining	Coal mining
Food processing	Property management	Pest management
Children's services	Seafood	Local government
Public service (Centrelink)	Air Services Australia	Entertainment
Textiles and dry cleaning	Hospitality	Quarrying
Horticulture		

While it is recognised that this list may not be comprehensive, it does indicate that partnerships in assessment are not isolated phenomena. Partners involved in relationships include public and private RTOs, consultants, multinational companies and small enterprises, industry associations and unions working together using different models to gain recognition and qualifications for people in a range of workplaces.

Focus of the study

The following research questions addressed by this study included:

- Why do RTOs and non-registered organisations collaborate in auspiced assessment arrangements?
- What are the key features of these arrangements and how do they vary from partnership to partnership?
- What approaches to quality assurance have been implemented by RTOs?
- Have experiences with the process of auspiced assessment met the initial expectations of each of the partners in the arrangements?
- What additional skill development has been undertaken in either the RTOs or the enterprises in order to effectively undertake the roles and responsibilities identified in the formal arrangements?
- What factors are critical to effective assessment partnerships?

The specific research questions addressed at each case-study site in this study were:

- Why do RTOs and non-registered organisations collaborate in auspiced assessment arrangements?
- What are the key features of these arrangements and how do they vary from partnership to partnership?
- What approaches to quality assurance have been implemented by RTOs?
- Have experiences with the process of auspiced assessment met the initial expectations of each of the partners in the arrangements?
- What additional skill development has been undertaken in either the RTOs or the enterprises in order to effectively undertake the roles and responsibilities identified in the formal arrangements?
- What factors are critical to effective assessment partnerships?

The auspiced assessment partnerships examined in the study are outlined in table 2. More detailed information on each case is included in appendix B. In addition, a desk audit of arrangements used by school-based VET providers of training was undertaken and this is included as appendix C.

Table 2: Key features of partnerships

Industry area	Features			
	RTO	Partner	Type of agreement	Qualifications
Meat processing	AQIS Training Services	Cargill Meats	Simple	Certificate II, III & IV
Pest management	Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT)	Australian Environmental Pest Managers' Association (AEPMA)	Complex	Certificate II, III & IV
Property management	Sydney Institute of Technology (SIT) & Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT)	NSW Department of Housing (DoH)	Complex	Certificate IV
Food processing	Goulbourn–Ovens Institute of Technology	National Foods	Complex	Certificate I to IV
Petrochemicals	East Gippsland Institute of TAFE	Santos	Complex	Certificate I to IV
Children's services	University of Ballarat	Kilmany Family Care	Complex	Diploma

The key elements that were the focus of each research question in this study were drawn out during the development of the semi-structured interview schedules. The main research questions together with these elements are discussed below.

Impetus for collaboration

In examining the impetus for collaboration, the focus was largely upon the enterprises involved in the relationships, the conditions in the organisations prior to collaboration, and the identification of the drivers and barriers to partnering and issues associated with the negotiation of arrangements.

As indicated in the literature on partnerships, the impetus for collaboration generally comes from a desire to make best use of partner expertise or features for the mutual benefit of all involved in the relationship. Strategic alliances also allow each of the organisations to do what they do best—which is continuing with their core business. This was a common feature of all but one of the partnership arrangements included in these case studies.

The initiators of partnerships for all but the Kilmany Family Care–University of Ballarat relationship were the enterprises or organisations requesting services related to training. None of them wanted to go through the process or the expense of becoming an RTO, but all wanted the skills of their workers recognised. They also wanted to build the skills of their workforce, to

improve their existing training infrastructure or to implement structured training. In the case of the meat processing, pest management and food processing examples, an additional driving force was regulatory or licensing requirements. For Cargill Foods, the NSW Department of Housing, and National Foods, new enterprise bargaining agreements relating classification structures to training provided further impetus to collaboration. In the case of Santos, the new agreement matched existing structures.

While regulations, licensing and industrial awards have been influential in initiating these relationships, a significant role has also been played by industry training advisory bodies in three of the six case studies. In contrast, the university largely drove the Kilmany Family Care–University of Ballarat collaboration.

In nearly all of the organisations there were people who could be classified as 'torch bearers.' These were people who were prepared to take up the challenges, work through the issues and establish innovative practices in order to meet the particular needs of the partner organisations, reflecting the important issues discussed by Lendrum (2000), who suggests that individuals need creativity, imagination and flexibility in such alliances.

In responding to questions regarding the barriers to the establishment and ongoing maintenance of partnerships, informants spoke of concrete issues such as the lack of time, money and resources. Where partners were working across distances, an additional set of constraints to the smooth running of negotiations and the delivery of services was created.

Other barriers identified by some of the respondents related to the different levels of understanding of VET and VET policies and procedures that existed between the partners. This sometimes made it difficult for partners to clarify exactly what services were to be provided and how. In enterprises where there were established training cultures and previous experience with an RTO, this tended to be less of an issue. Cultural difference, however, is a significant factor that needs to be considered when establishing working relationships.

Key features of partnership arrangements

In examining the key features of each partnership, the focus was on the partnership model employed, the types and content of agreements being used and the degree of formality of these, the personnel involved and other details regarding the process of negotiation and agreement. The purpose, target audience, scope, AQF level and qualifications issued, as well as the modes of delivery of the services, were determined.

In all but one case, the training and assessment carried out under the auspiced arrangement was for both entry to the industry and the existing workforce within each of the enterprises. Certificates in Pest Management were delivered and assessed fully on the job while the Diploma of Community Services (Childcare) was delivered off the job. In the remaining partnerships, training and assessment occurred both on and off the job, with the latter taking place in training rooms on work sites.

Details of the target audience, mode of delivery and qualifications covered in the six partnerships are outlined in table 3.

The formal documentation supporting the six partnerships presented in these case studies demonstrated quite disparate approaches. They ranged from a relatively simple and quite informal letter of agreement (Cargill–AQIS), through to highly detailed contracts (Santos, DoH–SIT), Service Agreements (The University of Ballarat–Kilmany Family Care) and memorandums of understanding (AEPMA–CIT, SIT–CIT). The degree of complexity of the formal documentation tended to match the degree of complexity and cost of the delivery of services. In other words, the more costly the activity in monetary or risk terms, the more detailed the formal documentation.

Table 3: Key features of partnerships: Training and assessment focus

Partnership	Feature			
	Target audience		Mode of delivery	Qualifications
	Entry	*Existing*		
Meat processing	✓	✓	On & off the job	Certificate II, III & IV
Pest management	✓	✓	On the job	Certificate II, III & IV
Property management	✓	✓	On & off the job	Certificate IV
Food processing	✓	✓	On & off the job	Certificate I to IV
Petrochemicals	✓	✓	On & off the job	Certificate I to IV
Children's services	✓		Off the job	Diploma of Community Services (Childcare)

In all but one example (pest management), the emphasis of the documentation was on roles and responsibilities, resource requirements, management and administration of the arrangement, and fees and charges. There was limited information provided in the agreements in relation to the quality assurance approaches that were to be implemented and how they would be likely to be undertaken. It would appear that these were going to be decisions made at a later date after successful implementation of the partnership. This again reflects the notion of getting on with making the relationship work and achieving the purpose for which the collaboration was established.

In the case of the pest management partnership, the experience gained in other similar relationships provided the RTO representative with a foundation of practical quality assurance strategies. Given that licensing was a crucial component of the agreement, care was taken to ensure that the relevant quality assurance strategies were documented and the roles agreed.

Strategies for quality assurance

In the context of the quality assurance aspect of assessment, the focus of the research in relation to the enterprises and the RTOs was on the selection of the quality assurance approach, the justification for choice and the person with responsibility for making these decisions. Informants were also asked to reflect upon resource requirements (time, money and people) as well as the effectiveness and manageability of the chosen approaches.

All six partnerships used a range of strategies to quality-assure the assessments conducted on their behalf. Regardless of the quality assurance approach, all parties in the arrangements had confidence in the assessment judgements that were being made.

There were four facets of quality assurance utilised in the six case studies. These were:

- the selection, training and ongoing professional development of assessors
- the development of resources to support the conduct of assessment, including assessment policy, assessment procedures, assessment tools, evidence collection guidelines and exemplars
- the information on assessment for assessors and candidates
- the verification and validation strategies, including strategies for team assessment and validation by sampling.

The first three facets related to the establishment or the commencement of the program and could be considered to be up-front strategies. The fourth facet related more to establishing checks and balances at some point through the assessment process.

Selection, training and ongoing professional development

In all six cases, considerable emphasis was placed upon setting in place at the front-end of the program strategies to support quality assessment outcomes. In each partnership, there was a focus on selection, initial training and commitment to ongoing professional development of assessors. Initial training was designed not only to provide people with the skills to undertake assessment, but

also to assist in the promotion of the value of recognition, skill development and qualifications for people in the target organisation. The Canberra Institute of Technology, the Sydney Institute of Technology, the University of Ballarat, Santos, National Foods and AQIS all assisted in the training, credentialling and support of workplace assessors. Also demonstrated was an additional commitment by the RTOs to assist in further training to maintain the number and the currency of assessors.

In the property management and pest management cases, assessment policies, procedures and tools were developed jointly. In the case of petrochemicals, food processing and children's services, training and assessment policies and procedures were utilised from existing policies (of possibly the RTO) or were generally part of the organisation's quality management or enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA).

The development of resources to support the conduct of assessment, including assessment policy, assessment procedures, assessment tools, evidence collection guidelines and exemplars

In parallel with the development process, guidelines for the type and quality of the evidence to be provided were identified. In the case of property management, model answers were provided to assessors to ensure consistency in the determination of competency. In the meat processing example, assessment materials from the training package were adapted to suit the specific context of the Cargill's site and there was an agreed understanding by assessors and supervisors of the standards required for a candidate to be deemed competent. In the Santos and National Foods cases, partners jointly developed extensive assessment tools and information on evidence requirements. In the University of Ballarat case, existing assessment materials were contextualised, with input from both partners, to meet the specific needs of the target audience.

Information on assessment for assessors and candidates

The third facet of the quality assurance strategies implemented in these cases was the development of quality information for assessors and candidates. In the meat processing case, this information was clearly set out in the training package and the EBA. Given the nature of the workforce, there was less emphasis on the written word than in the other cases. The requirements for assessment and the standards were discussed with trainees and confirmed by workplace supervisors.

In the housing and pest management cases, extensive printed information and resources were developed to support the training and assessment process. Kits for candidates and assessors, information on recognition of current competencies (RCC), procedures for assessment, details of the qualifications available and information to support the making of assessment judgements were all clearly set out. The extent and quality of information provided both candidates and assessors with a clear understanding of what was expected of them.

In the National Foods case, the information to candidates and assessors was provided in a number of ways: via the EBA, through a kit to assessors and a kit to candidates, through the meetings and minutes of the Training Committee as well the constant on-site presence of the training co-ordinator. In the Santos partnership, assessors and candidates were provided with online information via the Santos intranet. The University of Ballarat in their partnership provided information to assessors by means of professional development days and the provision of a tutor's guidelines kit.

Verification and validation strategies, including strategies for team assessment and validation by sampling

For property management, petrochemicals, children's services, food processing, pest management and to a certain extent, meat processing, several strategies which did not fall into the up-front category of quality assurance of assessment were utilised. All partnerships included an element of team assessment to verify some assessment processes and decisions. The food processing and the

petrochemicals cases also used a two-stage assessment process; firstly, making use of a team of assessors; and secondly, ensuring validation of the judgements. In addition, pest management, petrochemicals and property management were implementing validation through the sampling of a small percentage of assessments. Validation of assessment judgements in meat processing occurred back in the workplace as part of the quality management system. A similar process was in place for food processing. Only the Santos partnership employed an audit process to validate assessments and review the assessment processes undertaken by the enterprise. This approach supported the Santos quality management system which required internal annual review. The University of Ballarat utilised a series of ongoing reviews, two committees and a survey at the partnership's closure to quality-assure the outcomes of the program.

In summary, the choices that partners in these collaborations have made about assuring the quality of their assessment were generally pragmatic ones. Choices were influenced by the degree of risk placed on the assessments in high-risk worksites, the amount of time and money available for allocation to the quality assurance and the geographical proximity of the two partners. For housing, pest management, children's services and petrochemicals, the assessors and the candidates were dispersed and assessors rarely, if ever, had the opportunity to get together to discuss assessment or review processes and the decisions that they made.

Given the nature of the arrangements, printed information and guidelines provided up-front to assessors and candidates were seen as the most appropriate methods for standardising approaches and gaining consistency in outcomes. Up-front strategies were also perceived to be much more manageable when large numbers of assessors and candidates were involved. Anything else was likely to be much more expensive to undertake.

Reflections on the partnership

In asking informants to reflect upon their partnership arrangement, the emphasis was on determining partner expectations and experiences in the relationship. Also discussed were their views on skill development and skill deficits, strategies for support, areas for improvement and benefits to themselves and their organisation from involvement in these relationships.

The informants in all case studies considered that a certain degree of skill development of personnel was required for the success of their particular program. Personnel from RTOs noted such areas as project management skills, computing skills and technical currency in the relevant vocational competencies as being important for development. Even more emphasis was placed on skill development in the area of workplace assessment.

Some informants had fewer opportunities for skill development than others. In the food processing case, the enterprise ensured that the RTO training co-ordinator understood the complexities of the workplace and of assessment. Understanding the complexities of the workplace was seen to enhance not only the acceptance and take-up of the program, but also to impact on the quality of assessment tool development and the assessment support materials. Advanced assessor training involving assessment tool development and the need for clear assessment information for all participants in the assessment process was seen as essential for training co-ordinators across the sites.

In general, all informants in all cases reflected favourably on their partnerships.

For the NSW Department of Housing, AEPMA and Cargill Foods Australia, the experience of being involved in an auspiced assessment arrangement was seen as a highly positive one. As the purchasers of services from the RTOs, they considered that the processes established for training and assessment were both manageable and good value for money. In addition, the three organisations rated the quality of the outcomes very highly. All three acknowledged that the RTO personnel were generally accessible, responsive to their needs and aware of the organisational culture in which they were working. RTO members in each partnership were readily accepted as members of the enterprise or organisational team.

The views of the RTOs on their involvement in these partnerships, however, were less consistent. All accepted that clear strategies for open communication were important, and in the two relationships where partners, trainees and assessors were widely dispersed, communication links caused some concern.

RTO partners also raised issues associated with the logistics of providing services tailored to suit specific partner needs. Managing training and assessment for large numbers of trainees, often with limited notice, had demanded considerable flexibility and adaptability on the part of teachers and trainers. For SIT and CIT, this had to occur within organisational infrastructures that were sometimes inflexible in nature. The size and scope of the requirements, particularly to track trainees through the training, were seen as problematic issues in property management, meat processing and pest management partnerships.

In two other instances the administrative requirements of the RTOs were seen to be barriers to the implementation of the program and with 'getting on with the job'. Furthermore, distance between the partners generated logistical problems. In the food processing case, much of this was overcome by having a training co-ordinator on site, working alongside the enterprise personnel. The infrastructure (in terms of cost of travel, travel time, food and accommodation and communication facilities) requirements to support a distance partnership placed an additional burden on the cost of services provided by the RTO (or in the case of children's services, the enterprise). In at least one case, the informants cited difficulty in calculating this cost.

Only one partnership had terminated the contract agreement. In this case, it was because the project where the partnership had been initiated had finished. As a consequence, the children's services informants were in a position to reflect on the success of their partnership with somewhat less involvement than those in the other cases. Of particular interest in this study was the extent of constant review and negotiations undertaken throughout the project to ensure that both parties benefitted from the alliance. A similar strategy was being used in the food processing case, whereby constant review and adjustments to the partnership model had become accepted practice.

The enterprises in the six cases considered their alliances had been beneficial to the successful implementation of training and assessment in their workplaces. In all cases, this implementation has been linked to a broader strategic plan such as change management, improving safety and workplace practices or meeting the regulatory or legislative requirements. In the case of children's services, the enterprise viewed the partnership as a mechanism to broaden the skills and experience of its workforce while meeting a perceived need in their region. A more pragmatic reason frequently cited was that most enterprises did not want to take on the responsibility and cost of becoming an RTO and maintaining that registration. Rather, their focus was better placed on their core business.

All RTOs within these partnerships generally viewed the benefits as increased services to industry and the development of an enhanced profile and the establishment of networks facilitating other alliances and projects. Broadening the skills (especially industry knowledge and understanding) of the RTO staff were benefits that could not be measured.

Critical elements in working partnerships

Under this heading, the focus was on the identification of what each of the partner representatives considered as crucial aspects in making their relationship work well.

From the literature, the characteristics of effective partnerships are identified as:

- a willingness to collaborate
- a shared vision of what might be achieved, including a set of agreed goals
- respect and trust
- good communication
- effective and respected leadership

- an acceptance of differing cultures
- flexibility and a willingness to take risks
- new skills and mindsets.

Respondents raised all of these when talking about the critical issues that made their partnerships work well. Particular emphasis was placed on good communication, respect, trust and honesty. In the cases of the NSW Department of Housing and the pest management partnerships, the ability of people to openly communicate, work through the issues and reach consensus were deemed to be major features for all of the partners. Communication became an issue when people could not be readily contacted or where decisions were not recorded and disseminated to all interested parties. Some of the contentious communication issues surfaced simply because people were some distance from each other. Communication was not an issue in the meat processing and food processing arrangements because partners were co-located.

The University of Ballarat and the pest management team together with NSW Department of Housing emphasised the idea of developing new mindsets and what Kerka (1997) calls 'new corporate architectures' in working collaboratively. The people within these organisations were required to change their thinking to develop an ability to see the big picture and to modify structures and policies to ensure that their service delivery was effective for themselves and their clients.

Informants also identified quite specific aspects that were critical in the context of their own environments. Three enterprise representatives highlighted how important it was that there be evidence of progress. Such evidence was crucial to the success of the program and the partnership. There needed to be observable evidence on the part of those who were the target audience of the program that the aims of the program were in the process of being achieved. While managers were happy to be more patient, the workforce needed to know that it was going to work and that there would be positive outcomes for them. This was seen as a vital part of winning over personnel to new industrial and training arrangements.

Beyond the concept of trust and co-operation, it was evident that the personnel from RTOs became integrated into the worksite teams and were seen to be integral to team outcomes. This was particularly true in the instances of National Foods and the NSW Department of Housing where all partners noted the very strong interpersonal relationships.

Credibility of the RTO service provider was an important factor in the Cargill–AQIS collaboration. This allowed ready acceptance and access to the worksite. This was also true with the enterprise manager (Santos) who had recent past experience as an employee of the training provider.

Critical elements of a more context-specific nature mentioned by informants related to the need to ensure that there was one person to act as the main contact for each partner. This person also needed have the capacity and authority to make decisions and initiate actions. This was particularly relevant to the partnership arrangements that involved multiple partners, or those involved in delivering on multiple sites throughout large states or across state boundaries. This was raised in both the pest management and property management cases.

For the primary contractor in the property management case study, there was also a need to develop a strategy for anticipating the problems that may be encountered. An ongoing discussion, review and feedback process would perhaps help to 'second-guess' some of the problems and allow for the establishment systems to overcome them before they became major issues for the team.

Summary

For the enterprises examined in this study, the reasons for entering into collaboration for assessment purposes were largely strategic. They wanted their training and the skills of their workers recognised under the AQF. They did not want to become RTOs, but they did want to

maintain control over their own training delivery and assessment and have an RTO support their efforts and confirm the credibility of the outcomes through a system of quality assurance.

The negotiation processes, timeframes and the formal documentation of these partnership arrangements vary to some degree, but the quality assurance strategies that have been employed were relatively consistent across the six cases.

All partners considered their partnerships to be successful and productive, but their reflections consistently identified distance and communication as two of the difficulties that had to be addressed. For the larger RTOs in the arrangements under review, the demands for flexibility were administratively problematical at times.

All partners nominated truth, honesty and open communication as the crucial elements in their working relationships.

Guidelines for partnerships in assessment

The literature on partnerships and the information gathered through these case studies provides some quality advice in this area. More extensive resources are also available to assist in the establishment and maintenance of assessment arrangements in partnerships (see DETYA 2001a, 2001b).

For those intending to go into partnerships, the following should be addressed:

- steps in the preliminary negotiations and clarification of the services needed
- documentation of formal agreements, content and context
- compliance requirements and quality assurance arrangements
- maintenance and review of partnerships.

Preliminary negotiations and clarification of the services

When putting together a new collaborative arrangement for assessment, it is important that all partners clarify exactly what is expected from the relationships. As indicated by many of the partners involved in the partnerships described in this study, negotiations may take some time, but they are time and resources that are well spent.

A flow chart illustrating the stages of preliminary negotiation is included at appendix D. It provides a useful guide for organisations embarking on assessment partnerships.

Documentation of formal agreements, content and context

With the new AQTF standards for RTOs (ANTA 2001), there are three requirements that must be in place in any partnership of this nature. They are:

- formal agreement
- register of formal agreements
- supporting quality assurance strategies.

From the agreements associated with the six case studies examined in this study the following are proposed as a sound structure for a formal agreement:

- description of collaborating organisations
- objectives and scope of the arrangement
- nature of the collaboration
- any definitions and interpretations needed
- terms of the agreement
- organisation and management of the agreement
- resources and facilities required
- arrangements relating to fees and charges
- resources and facilities required
- arrangements relating to fees and charges

- quality assurance strategies and responsibilities
- protocols of communication
- issues relating to intellectual property
- processes for dispute resolution
- strategies for regular review and feedback.

The degree of detail included in formal arrangements will be largely dependent upon the how much risk and money are involved in the partnership.

Compliance requirements and quality assurance arrangements

In addition to the formal agreement, the AQTF standards for RTOs (ANTA 2001) state that a register of the formal agreements must be kept. Guidance on what should be contained in the register can be obtained from the state or territory registering body.

It is suggested that the following are the minimum details that could be kept on the register:

- names of the partner organisation(s)
- names of people legally responsible for the agreement within the partner organisation(s), such as chief executive officers (CEOs)
- principal contact person
- unit(s) of competency and/or qualifications covered by the agreement
- summary of the services provided by each of the partners
- duration of the agreement
- critical review/reporting dates
- where the written agreement is stored (DETYA 2001a).

A number of quality assurance strategies are possible in any partnership arrangement. The strategies used in the partnerships examined in this study can be grouped in the following clusters:

- the selection, training and ongoing professional development of assessors
- the development of resources to support the conduct of assessment, including assessment policy, assessment procedures, assessment tools, evidence collection guidelines and exemplars
- information on assessment for assessors and candidates
- verification and validation strategies, including strategies for team assessment and validation by sampling.

The first three clusters relate to the establishment or the commencement of the program and could be considered to be up-front strategies. The fourth cluster relates more to establishing checks and balances at some point through the assessment process.

The decision about which to utilise must be made after a careful assessment of the time, money and resources that partners can commit to the process. Where there is a need to guarantee the high levels of confidence in the assessment outcomes, there must be a greater commitment of resources to confirming the quality of assessment processes, tools and decisions (see DETYA 2001a, 2001b).

At the same time, RTOs must be aware that they are required to validate assessments and this involves personnel reviewing, comparing and evaluating on an annual basis, the processes of assessment, the tools used, the evidence gathered and the judgements made. The quality assurance process also requires that RTOs document any action taken to improve the quality and consistency of assessment.

Maintenance and review of partnerships

In reflecting upon their own partnerships in assessment, the key informants to this study emphasised the importance of maintenance and review to healthy working relationships. They noted that their partnerships had evolved over time and their views about the best ways of doing things had also evolved in that time.

Several of the partnerships have built in review mechanisms and continuous improvement is a strong focus in the relationships.

A review process requires:

- clear communication between key people in the partner organisations together with a commitment to being available to discuss issues as they arise; communication does not always need to be face-to-face, but it does need to be regular
- an agreed strategy for resolving conflict at the time that it arises; such a strategy should be set down in the formal agreement
- regular meetings between the people who are delivering the training and those who are managing the assessments; networking is particularly crucial for assessors, as they need to ensure that they are being consistent in the way they are assessing and making the judgements
- an examination of the match between the goals of the program which the focus of the partnership and the actual outcomes that are achieved to determine where and how improvements can be made
- the sharing of the information gathered through the quality assurance process and the open discussion of areas needing improvement
- mechanisms for gathering feedback from people undertaking the training and assessment (this can be done using feedback sheets, simple surveys and focus groups)
- self-assessment or peer review of the skills of trainers and assessors to identify areas for up-skilling or re-training.

Having identified and implemented a set of quality assurance strategies when the partnership commences, it is also critical that these strategies be evaluated in an ongoing way to determine their effectiveness. This evaluation of the approach to quality assurance should be documented and any improvements noted and implemented.

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Appendix A: Methodology

The aims of the study

The aims of the research were to:

- document examples of formal auspicing arrangements
- identify details of the quality assurance strategies being employed to support quality assessment
- determine the critical elements of effective auspicing arrangements
- provide some practical guidelines for the development of sound assessment partnerships.

Research questions

The research questions addressed by this study included:

- Why do RTOs and non-registered organisations collaborate in auspiced assessment arrangements?
- What are the key features of these arrangements and how do they vary from partnership to partnership?
- What approaches to quality assurance have been implemented by RTOs?
- Have experiences with the process of auspiced assessment met the initial expectations of each of the partners in the arrangements?
- What additional skill development has been undertaken in either the RTOs or the enterprises in order to effectively undertake the roles and responsibilities identified in the formal arrangements?
- What factors are critical to effective assessment partnerships?

The research methods used

A descriptive case-study approach was used in undertaking this study. This method was chosen because it would allow the asking of questions not only about 'what' in relation to auspiced assessment partnerships, but also about 'why'. As suggested by Yin (1994), the one of the case study is also an appropriate research strategy when the researcher has little control over the events occurring with a particular phenomenon in a real-life context.

A multiple-case design was employed so that sources of evidence could be drawn from a range of partnerships in assessment. In this way, relationships between factors could be examined and patterns, commonalities and contrasts identified.

Stake (1995) and Yin (1994) note that a number of sources of evidence that can be investigated in case studies are available. These are documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation and physical artefacts. Given the nature of the partnerships in this study, the most viable sources of evidence were interviews with key informants within each organisation, and documents associated with the day-to-day activities of the relationships. As a consequence, formal agreements, letters relating to negotiations, resources supporting delivery, printed information to assessors and candidates, assessment materials, conference and seminar presentations and marketing and publicity materials have been analysed as part of this study.

In examining the information collected, each individual case has been considered as a single unit prior to some analysis across all six cases. As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), this method is a way of establishing whether behaviours, processes and outcomes occur across cases and to offer greater explanation of the degree to which these things may be influenced by local conditions.

The research was conducted in four stages, as outlined below.

Stage one

Stage one involved the research team undertaking a review of the literature as well as a desktop/ electronic (web-based, telephone, email) audit to identify potential case-study sites. The focus of the review of the literature was on policy and procedures, evidence of auspicing partnerships and collaboration both in Australia and overseas.

All national and a number of state industry training advisory bodies and industry associations were contacted as they were likely to be a key source of information on partnership arrangements. From these sources, relevant RTOs were identified; subsequently the researchers contacted individuals within those organisations. This resulted in a list of potential case-study sites being developed.

Guidelines were determined for selecting the case-study sites. These were designed to give researchers the greatest variation across sites so that the commonalities and contrasts could be identified. The aspects of auspiced assessment partnerships covered by the guidelines are shown in table 4.

Table 4: Guidelines for selection of case-study sites

Aspect	Description
Structure	Structure of the relationship; that is, the model employed.
Existence of formal arrangements	Whether arrangements were highly developed and formal or informal in nature.
Characteristics of the partners, participants and AQF levels	Type and size of organisations, metropolitan and non-metropolitan; variations of target candidates; mix of public and private providers, large and small enterprises, government-funded training providers (TAFE institutes) as well as various categories; private training organisations and consultants
Length of relationship	A range of long-term, ongoing, newly established or completed
Industry sector	A range of industry sectors
Location	A range of states, regions and cross-border initiatives
Agreement	All parties involved in the partnership were willing to participate in the study

Through the application of the guidelines to the potential case-study sites, the final list was established and approval was sought from relevant parties for each of the organisations to participate in the study.

Six case-study sites were selected for in-depth examination. They were:

- Cargill Foods Australia (Wagga Wagga) and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (meat processing), an example of a range of partnerships with enterprises and AQIS in all Australian states
- Santos (Queensland) and Eastern Gippsland Institute of TAFE (petrochemicals), an example of a cross-border initiative
- Kilmany Family Care (Bairnsdale) and University of Ballarat (children's services), an example of a remote Aboriginal community training partnership
- National Foods and Goulbourn–Ovens Institute of TAFE (food processing), an example of auspicing on one site for a large national enterprise
- NSW Department of Housing, Sydney Institute of TAFE and Canberra Institute of Technology, an example of a large governmental department working with two large RTOs delivering a range of assessment services

- Australian Environmental Pest Managers' Association (AEPMA), Peter Meadows Consulting and Canberra Institute of Technology, a partnership blending an industry association, a pest management technical expert and a large RTO to assess staff in pest management enterprises across Australia for licensing purposes.

Stage two

A standardised set of procedures and general rules for data collection were developed which could be applied across all case-study sites. This included the development of:

- a semi-structured interview schedule, together with a template for recording information for the RTO and for the enterprise
- a partnership arrangement document list
- a declaration of confidentiality form (appendix E).

These documents were trialled and adjustments made.

Details of the information requirements and case-study questions were then forwarded to the selected case-study sites and dates for visits agreed.

Stage three

The researchers conducted site visits. Phone and email follow-up occurred with a representative of each organisation in the partnership. In some instances, managers in the RTO and the enterprise, as well as personnel dealing with the day-to-day aspects of the partnership, were interviewed.

Site visits involved taped interviews ranging between two and four hours in duration, together with the collection of relevant documentation of arrangements, training and assessment materials and examples of quality assurance processes, where available.

On completion, interview material was transcribed and collated into a form suitable for return to each site for clarification and verification by the key informants.

Stage four

In this stage, the verified site reports, the documentary evidence and training and assessment material provided by the partner organisation informants were coded, categorised and analysed against the research questions. The information from all partnerships was then synthesised to identify matching patterns and independent innovations across the cases.

Limitations of the study

It was originally intended to conduct a case study involving at least one VET-in-Schools partnership arrangement. After initial investigation of approaches to auspicing for schools by RTOs, it was evident that the range of policies and structures varied markedly from state to state and territory. The decision was made that there was little value in describing one situation in depth that may have no relevance to other VET-in-Schools situations. As a consequence, a desk audit of the range of policies and supporting documentation has been substituted for the case study. This is provided in appendix C.

It took considerable time and exhaustive questioning to clarify whether identified partnerships were in fact auspiced arrangements. This was partially due to the partners' lack of understanding as to what constituted a formal auspiced assessment arrangement. Because of this lack of clarity about the concept, it was necessary to double-check that these arrangements involved the auspicing of a non-registered organisation assessments by an RTO, and were not just simply organisations working together to achieve a particular training and assessment end.

Certain assumptions were made by the researchers about the existence, accessibility and quality of the documentation supporting partnership arrangements in assessment. There were considerable variations in what was available and therefore analysis of the documents associated with each partnership was often rather limited. The one consistent piece of documentary evidence that was made available by all partners was the formal agreement.

A further constraint on the technical side of the study was the inability to access all of the players in each organisation who had been involved in establishing and maintaining the relationship. Some partnerships had been in place for a considerable length of time and many of those who had been involved in the original decisions had moved on and were no longer available to the researchers. In every instance, the people who were responsible for the day-to-day running of the partnership were contacted, but other more senior decision-makers could not always be included in the interviews.

The very nature of case-study research requires examination in sufficient depth to provide detailed description and extensive information about the case or cases under investigation. The extent of examination achievable in these cases was restricted at some sites, simply because key informants could not be released from their day-to-day duties for any extended period of time. The realities of the workplace required pragmatic decisions to be made by both informants and researchers.

The competitive climate in which VET is delivered also proved to be a limitation to the study. Often, where a degree of detail could be extracted from either the enterprise or the RTO, it could not be used or reported because of the commercial nature of that information. This was particularly true in relation to the cost of services, the strategies for funding and some of the mechanisms for training and assessment. The reasoning behind the restriction on the dissemination of this information is acknowledged; however, some of this detail is potentially crucial for others seeking to establish similar partnerships.

Appendix B: Case studies

Examples of partnerships in assessment

The following case studies outline active partnership arrangements involving auspiced assessment. Each of these arrangements is supported by a formal agreement of some description. As outlined in the methodology, the selection of these case studies was made on the basis of matching against a set of specific criteria. It is not the intention of the researchers for these case studies are seen as examples of best practice but simply to represent models of the concept of auspicing in action.

Case study 1

Australian Environmental Pest Managers' Association, Peter Meadows Consulting and the Canberra Institute of Technology in partnership to deliver and assess competencies for the pest management industry

Case study 2

Cargill Foods Australia, Wagga Wagga Plant and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services Training Services in partnership to deliver and assess competencies for the meat processing industry

Case study 3

National Foods and Goulbourn–Ovens Institute of TAFE in partnership to deliver and assess competencies in Food processing, Communications (Call Centres) and Transport and distribution (Warehousing)

Case study 4

The New South Wales Government's Department of Housing and the Sydney Institute of Technology with CIT Solutions, Canberra Institute of Technology in partnership to deliver and assess competencies for the Certificate IV in Property Management (Public Housing).

Case study 5

Santos and East Gippsland Institute of TAFE in partnership to deliver and assess competencies in Process plant skills, Process plant operations and Process plant technology

Case study 6

The University of Ballarat and Kilmany Children's Services in partnership to deliver and assess the Diploma of Community Services (Childcare) in eight locations for Aboriginal childcare workers

The case-study framework

The information provided in each case study has been collected against a framework which allows some degree of comparison of the approaches adopted in the partnerships. This framework is detailed in table 5.

Table 5: Characteristics of partnerships

Characteristic	Description
Partnership members	Name and brief description of each partner, including core business, size, scope and location
Scope of qualifications and target audience for training and assessment	The qualification(s) covered by the agreement and the learners being assessed
The type of partnership agreement	The timing, type, key features and coverage of the agreement
The period of collaboration	Information on initial negotiation and set-up of the partnership arrangement, together with other items associated with duration
The impetus for the collaboration	Including the situation prior to the establishment of the arrangement (antecedent condition), the impetus for the partnership and any drivers and barriers
Brief description of the training and assessment process	How the training and assessment happens, who assesses, when, how and where; includes an outline of the key roles and responsibilities of the partners in the process
Quality assurance strategies	Identification of the strategies being used to ensure the quality of the assessment process and assessment outcomes; includes management of the processes, roles and responsibilities, communication strategies and reflection on manageability, value for money and quality of the outcome and the issues and limitations of the quality assurance approach
Partner reflection or review of the collaboration (all partners)	Identification of the skills development needed together with expectations and experiences and areas for improvement; overall barriers and limitations are also covered under this heading
Benefits to the organisations (all partners)	Identification of the benefits organisations see in being involved in their auspiced arrangement
Critical elements in a good strategic partnership and the elements critical to their own partnership	Partner views of the critical elements needed in order to make the partnership work effectively

'We've got assessors from Cairns to Broome'

The Australian Environmental Pest Managers' Association, Peter Meadows Consulting and CIT Solutions, Canberra Institute of Technology

Partnership member details

Formed in 1988, the Australian Environmental Pest Managers' Association is a national association representing the pest management industry. Companies and individuals make up the membership of the association. AEPMA is the representative body that deals with government instrumentalities and AEPMA delegates sit on a range of committees representing the industry.

The main objective for which the Association was established is outlined on the association's website (www.pestworld.org/aepma/). The goal is to:

> *Promote and develop the environmental pest management service industry in Australia and co-ordinate its activities so that it may serve to the fullest extent the best interests of the industry and the Australian community.*

Among other things, the ongoing activities of the association include:

- providing forums, meetings and activities for members, to encourage and generate mutually beneficial relationships
- encouraging participation and support for industry training programs
- encouraging the adoption of safe working practices and environmentally responsible operations within the industry
- maintaining ethical and professional management practices
- enhancing quality and professionalism in the pest management industry.

Peter Meadows is an expert providing consultancy services to the pest management industry, government agencies and the legal, medical and insurance professions. He has represented the industry on Standards Australia committees and, as the industry representative on the Property Services Industry Training Advisory Board, has been highly influential in the development of the National Pest Management Industry Competency Standards and the assessment process linked to them.

CIT Solutions Pty Limited is a subsidiary of the Canberra Institute of Technology, the major public provider of vocational education and training in the ACT. A registered training provider, the institute delivers training in the area of property and assets maintenance.

Scope of qualifications and target audience

The qualifications covered by this partnership arrangement were:

- Certificate II in Asset Maintenance (Pest Management—Technical)
- Certificate II in Asset Maintenance (Pest Management—Business Operations)
- Certificate III in Asset Maintenance (Pest Management—Technical)
- Certificate III in Asset Maintenance (Pest Management—Business Operations)
- Certificate IV in Asset Maintenance (Pest Management).

The certificate II was the core of the training, although only some units within the certificate II were required for a licence. Most of the legislative authorities are empowered through a health act. Therefore, only those units which include health requirements were considered essential (for example, chemicals, chemical storage, assessing). The focus was very much on ensuring there was no danger to the operator's health, the client's health or the environment.

As a consequence, the technical stream qualification related to jobs mainly concerned with handling and using pesticides and other pest management equipment needed to control or

eliminate pests. The business operations stream qualifications addressed the business-related competencies associated with managing a pest management business.

The target audience for the training and assessment were new entrants to the industry. At the same time, existing workers were seeking to have their current competencies recognised and a considerable number of recognition of current competency assessments were completed. Such assessments not only provided existing operators with recognition of their skills, they were also influential in other ways. One informant noted:

> *What we are finding with people going through a field assessment is that when they are doing things that are incorrect, and you go back and have the feedback session with the candidate and his employer, you find out the employer is the one that is really at fault. They have trained them incorrectly. So there is a backwards-training effect from this and that is very good for the industry.*

Details of partnership

AEPMA had a services agreement, which was a memorandum of understanding with CIT Solutions, Canberra Institute of Technology. The agreement was signed in December 1999. The formal documentation covered:

- a purpose statement
- definitions and interpretations
- duration of the agreement
- CIT obligations under the agreement
- AEPMA obligations under the agreement
- assessment and certification methodology
- fees, charges and disbursements
- confidential information
- intellectual property
- transfer and assignment
- role of CIT Solutions
- warranty and indemnity
- termination of the agreement
- resolution of disputes.

Details of qualifications covered by the agreement, together with specific processes and procedure, were covered by a schedule attached to the formal agreement. The day-to-day issues were also covered as schedules.

Period of collaboration

Negotiations to establish the partnership in training and assessment were extensive. Initial discussions commenced in March 1998. They involved AEPMA, Peter Meadows Consulting and both national and state ITAB representatives. After eighteen months, the delivery and assessment model was determined and the collaboration commenced.

Impetus for collaboration

There are legislative requirements for the industry. However, there are variations from one state jurisdiction to another. The Pest Industry Government Sector (previously the Pest Industry Government Seminar) was formed to bring the various legislative and regulatory authorities together. This body forms an advisory committee for the enHealth Council. The Council provides national leadership, sets priorities and co-ordinates policies relating to environmental health issues. It also establishes partnerships with other sectors and agencies when dealing with particular environmental health issues that require specific expertise.

The pest management industry through the Australian Environmental Pest Managers' Association and Property Services Training Australia (the industry training advisory body covering pest management), were keen to introduce competency-based training and assessment in the industry. These organisations, together with other key stakeholders in the industry actively supported the development and endorsement of national competency standards for pest management and the Asset Maintenance Training Package, which covers both pest management and contract cleaning.

There are national standards for licensing pest management technicians which are linked to certain units of the competency standards. As a member of this industry noted:

> *The major thing is elevating the professionalism and training for our industry. Licensing is merely a part of that. It is about building the competency base and an acceptable training regime in the industry.*

The partnership commenced after the development of the training package. The key drivers for the collaboration, in this case, were the ITAB and the individuals in the partner organisations—AEPMA, Peter Meadows Consulting and the Canberra Institute of Technology.

Brief description of the training and assessment process

The responsibility for the training rested with individual pest management enterprises. A trainee enrolled through CIT and undertook the training on the job. The trainee then underwent the assessment of competencies in line with the procedures established under the auspiced arrangement. The pathways of recognition and assessment are detailed in the diagram on the following page.

The roles and responsibilities of each of the partner organisations in this process are given below.

AEPMA was responsible for:

- controlling the assessment process
- advising members of the process of applying for and undertaking assessment
- providing information to the industry on assessment
- providing copies of the training package to candidates
- keeping a register of workplace assessors
- ensuring workplace assessors remain current and undertake professional development activities
- publishing a list of RTOs and assessors who comply with utilise the training package as required by the industry.

Peter Meadows Consulting was responsible for:

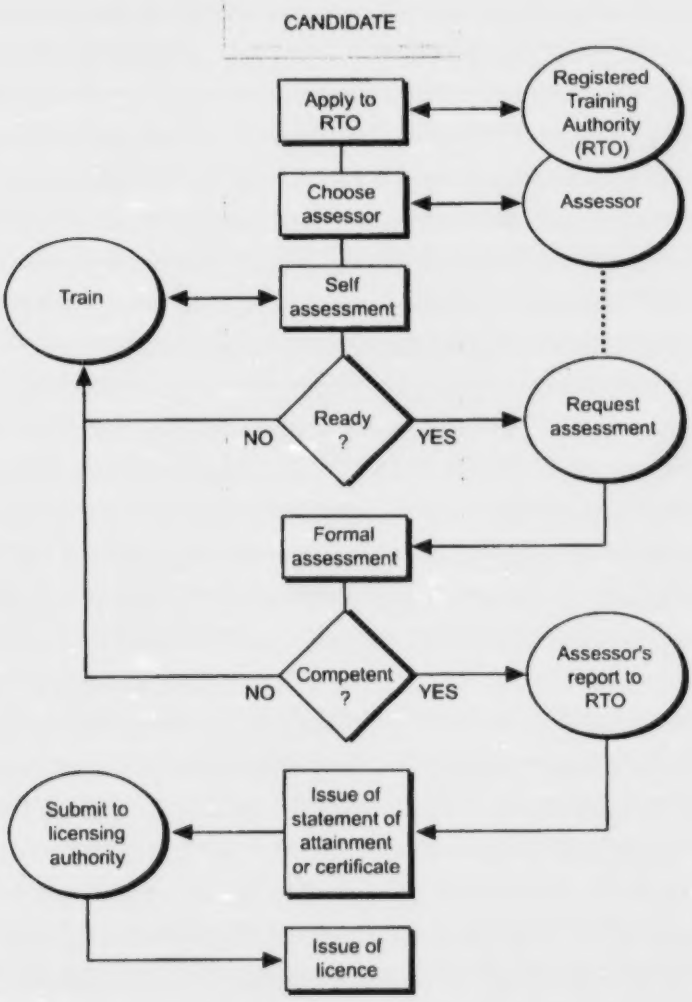
- advising all workplace assessors, RTOs and AEPMA on workplace assessment and training and acting as a mentor to AEPMA–CIT workplace assessors
- providing technical assistance for assessments and to RTOs as required
- conducting workplace assessments and training
- providing administrative support for CIT
- conducting assessment audits and ensuring adherence to quality assurance mechanisms for CIT.

CIT was responsible for:

- training workplace assessors for AEPMA
- referring candidates to AEPMA
- providing information for the information packs and kits that AEPMA will distribute
- providing professional development training and advice to assessors as required
- issuing qualifications
- quality-assuring the assessment and training process
- maintaining and keeping all required records and files.

Provided a candidate for a licence has a certificate from a registered training organisation, they can automatically obtain a licence to work in the industry.

Figure 1: Training and assessment pathways in the pest management partnership



Quality assurance strategies

The strategies for quality assurance of the assessment processes and assessment judgements were defined and agreed in the formal documentation that supported this arrangement.

At the commencement of the collaboration, CIT provided assessor training programs for selected people in the industry to ensure that there were people with the qualifications to undertake assessment. For the first of the assessors, competency in the technical units was also important. Thus, assessors were evaluated by a panel of industry experts in those units they wished to assess

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others against. Peter Meadows, the consultant in this partnership, was the first to be assessed and to obtain the Certificate IV in Pest Management.

No assessors could undertake assessment in areas where they did not hold the unit of competency themselves. The AEPMA maintained a register of member assessors. The register consisted of assessors who either owned or worked for an AEPMA member company and who had undergone approved assessor training. An RTO could use assessors who may not have been on that register, but under this agreement, only those assessments undertaken by assessors on the register were recognised by the partner RTO. One informant noted:

> *There are thirty-two assessors across all states and territories—literally Cairns to Broome. They are all trained. Training programs were run in Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane and all have got either category 2 or the certificate IV.*

As an association, AEPMA discouraged companies from assessing their own employees because they were concerned about the ethical implications of doing so. Companies could assess their own trainees, but the outcomes were not recognised under the AEPMA–CIT agreement.

The partners also developed additional rules relating to quality assurance. They were:

- Candidates can select their assessor from names provided by AEPMA.
- All parties involved in the process must be guided by the selected workplace assessor and feedback provided at regular intervals.
- All assessors must use the assessment instruments that were developed as part of the non-endorsed component of the training package.
- All assessors must hold the relevant qualifications as outlined in the training package.
- The CIT enrolment process must be used.
- A sample of 10–15% of assessments will be subject to validation by CIT.
- Assessors must undertake a prescribed amount of professional development over a two-year period.
- All information provided to candidates must conform to the standards required by AEPMA and CIT.
- RTOs who meet these quality assurance measures will be endorsed and their names published and promoted by AEPMA.

Assessors had access to printed information that detailed exactly what they were required to do in assessment. They were also made aware of the quality assurance processes to be applied. All paperwork was checked by CIT and the goal was to set in place validation of 10–15% of the assessments with some re-assessment.

The approach adopted for quality assuring assessments was selected after consideration of a range of other ways of checking the outcomes of assessment. Videos and portfolios of evidence were discussed, but issues of authenticity are an issue in an industry that consists of small businesses all over the country.

The appeals process under this agreement was covered by the CIT policy and procedures. However, it was outlined in the pest management documentation that an appeal against an assessment decision would be addressed by a re-assessment. This recognised that many of the enterprises involved in the industry were small businesses and there were some concerns about competitors questioning the competence of candidates. Thus, all appeals were handled by re-assessment through an assessor nominated by the RTO. As the responsible RTO, CIT would not challenge assessment decisions made by an assessor, but afforded the candidate an opportunity to resubmit their claims and to be assessed by another assessor.

Quality assurance within this partnership arrangement was based upon well-presented and highly informative information on assessment to both assessors and candidates. Information was disseminated through the association's magazine, *Professional pest manager*, which goes to a wider

audience than the members. Internal newsletters, seminars and conference presentations were also used to get the information out.

Full details of the training and assessment system were also reproduced in a kit for candidates and assessors. A registration form for CIT and an explanatory sheet of how the process works with the RTO were included in this kit. As one informant noted:

> *Importantly, the regulatory authorities are very, very keen on the quality assurance of assessment and many of them have reserved a right in their acts to demand some other assessment if they have any reason for suspicion of a particular assessor or RTO.*

Reflections on the partnership

From the perspective of the AEPMA, the process of establishing the training and assessment in the industry has been slow. There has not been a culture of training in the industry and companies are more interested in getting on with the job of pest management than undertaking training. The suggestion is that there is still a lack of understanding about competency-based training.

In relation to the partnership, the experience was seen as a good one by AEPMA. The partnership was underpinned by a frank, open and friendly relationship that was surprisingly free from bureaucratic procedures. In addition, the AEPMA rated both the manageability and value for money both as four out of five. It was noted, however, that the real impact was upon the enterprises and that they would possibly rate these things much lower. As one informant commented:

> *This process is much more demanding of employers and probably of trainees too. The fact that there is an assessment charge on top of whatever training is given and obtained is a new thing.*

Although the partners worked to solve any problems in the relationship, communication was still an area in which considerable improvement could have been made. The availability of personnel to answer calls and queries was also nominated as an issue in the day-to-day activities of the relationship. As one informant commented:

> *Availability is a critical thing, because if one partner is not accessible, everything slows down to a halt.*

The RTO representative also acknowledged that communication was something that did not work well in the initial stages of the relationship. The information going to the members about what was being done and how it would work was not well handled. Working through the peak body's magazine made information much more accessible and communication with interested parties more effective.

In rating the manageability of the training and assessment system, the quality assurance strategies, the value for money and the quality of the outcome, the consultant noted all were beyond four out of five.

From the RTO's perspective, the manageability of the training, assessment and quality assurance in the initial stages was extremely difficult. Better information to assessors, in the form of explicit flowcharts of the processes and details in magazines and newsletters, improved the situation greatly and resulted in a much higher rating for manageability.

In rating the quality of the outcome, the RTO manager of the project noted:

> *The licensing authorities have noticed the difference between the people who are applying for licences under this system and the people applying for licences under the traditional system.*

Both the AEPMA and CIT suggested that this partnership had allowed them to use their own strengths and skills while carrying out their core business. Developmentally, the RTO personnel built their skills in the areas of customised assessor training and resource material development.

Benefits to the organisations

For AEPMA, the major benefit of the partnership was that the association had not had to become an RTO to achieve its training goals. They had been prepared to seek registration had it been necessary, but it is now not an issue. The collaboration has brought with it a new status for AEPMA, and started the development of a training culture within the industry.

For CIT Solutions, it was a good business development opportunity. The partnership has also been acknowledged as a good-practice model that could be used to build further work for the Institute. As a member of the institute noted:

> *We are being asked to look at other small industry conglomerations in order to develop a similar system.*

Critical elements in the partnership

For the AEPMA informant, the interpersonal relationships in the partnership were very important, as were efficiency, effectiveness and availability.

In the consultant's view, the personal and interpersonal relationships that help form these partnerships were crucial. The formal agreement set in place the roles and responsibilities, but there was a need for considerable trust and confidence in the partners and the partnership for it to work well. People also needed to be prepared to be flexible in these types of working relationships.

For the RTO, the most critical element in the partnership was having the people to drive the process. This was a partnership where people from both organisations were willing to put in the hard work needed to establish and maintain the relationship.

Another important element in making the partnership work effectively was the commitment of the assessors. As one informant commented:

> *Whilst they saw it as an adjunct to their business in quiet times and maybe a way to make some money, what it cost them in the first place and their commitment to get it done, was critical. They are now committed to a training regime.*

The third critical element identified by CIT was being able to see results early enough to keep people involved and interested in the outcomes of the partnership.

'The impetus arose from a desire to get training going'

Cargill Foods Australia and AQIS Training Services

Partnership member details

Cargill is an international company which has been operating in Australia since 1967. Today, Cargill Australia businesses include oilseed processing, meat processing, grain trading and salt production, employing more than 1200 people in Australia. The major focus of the company is agribusiness. At Wagga Wagga in New South Wales, Cargill Foods Australia operates a beef processing plant with a workforce of approximately 550 people.

The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service Training Services (ATS) is a commercial training unit that provides consultancy and training services to the food processing industries. ATS is not a regulatory body but a facilitation arm of the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service.

ATS provides food industry employees with essential skills and knowledge through various training and consultancy services, including customised training programs, task analysis, development of in-house training programs and assessment and recognition of prior learning (RPL) for accredited training.

Scope of qualifications and target audience

The following training package qualifications were covered by this partnership arrangement:

- Certificate II in Meat Processing (Abattoirs)—a general qualification that addresses work in boning rooms and abattoirs
- Certificate III in Meat Processing—including qualifications in slaughtering, boning, meat safety, laboratory or rendering
- Certificate IV provides qualifications in the specialist streams of meat safety, quality assurance and leadership.

All trainees seeking entry into the Cargill workforce at Wagga undertook the Certificate II in Meat Processing. In 2000, approximately 200 trainees commenced training, with in excess of 60% continuing on in employment and further training.

The training at this plant was closely aligned to the requirements of the enterprise bargaining agreement. The classification system in the EBA broadbanded the current labour classifications into a fully integrated competency-based classification structure. In developing the structure, the industry training guidelines for the Australian meat industry were used.

The Meat Industry Training Advisory Council guidelines were adapted to make them specific to the Wagga Plant. The competencies, tasks, key elements and performance criteria were contained in the Cargill Foods Australia classification framework and training guidelines. Employees were classified and paid according to skills and competencies demonstrated and required in the workplace.

Appropriately qualified workplace assessors conducted assessment in accordance with the enterprise guidelines and such assessments formed the basis for determining classifications. At each level of employment, employees had to attain the required number of skills, and be able to demonstrate ability in the minimum core competencies required for that level.

Within the plant everyone was required to undertake training. New employees entering at the Food Processor (Probationary) level were required to complete structured on-the-job training. The operators were required to complete certificate II and III. Some supervisors and all the quality assurance staff undertook the certificate IV.

Details of partnership

The partnership agreement was a simple one. A letter of agreement was provided by ATS to the company. This was subsequently signed-off by the appropriate representative of Cargill Foods Australia. The letter briefly outlined the services and the costs involved. There were no extensive details of how the services were to be provided, nor were there any details of the exact processes for quality-assuring the outcomes of the training and assessment.

Roles and responsibilities were negotiated over time, but generally the ATS co-ordinator had responsibility for orientation and induction, monitoring the trainees in the workplace, assessment and maintenance of the training and assessment records.

The ATS training co-ordinator was co-located on the work site and worked in close association with the Human Resource Manager at the plant.

Period of collaboration

The initial negotiation and agreement were set in place in 1997.

Impetus for collaboration

Up until the past few years, monitoring and auditing of meat processing enterprises was undertaken by AQIS to ensure product integrity. In more recent times ATS facilitated the industry's move towards quality management. As part of this process, AQIS encouraged companies to develop partnerships with training providers to ensure that they conformed to the legislative requirements for quality assurance and that associated training was delivered by a registered training organisation.

Cargill Foods Australia wanted to develop and maintain a skilled workforce. The company did not have sufficient staff to undertake the training themselves. Given the financial incentives available, the company made a commitment to training and the traineeships system. In the Human Resources Manager's view, 'The impetus for the collaboration arose from the desire to get training going'.

Initial attempts to access a New South Wales RTO with scope to deliver the qualifications were unsuccessful, as were similar approaches to a provider in Victoria. Cargill were then approached by ATS, a registered training provider in their own right, and the partnership was negotiated.

The National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council (MINTRAC) has also actively encouraged partnerships between training providers and other meat industry enterprises such as Cargill Foods Australia.

Brief description of the training and assessment process

With some minor customisation to suit the existing operations and processes, the full training package was implemented in the workplace. Certificate II in Meat Processing (Abattoir) was delivered as part of the induction and orientation to the plant. The material provided in the training package formed the basis for the resources used in training delivery and assessment. Where necessary, these materials were adapted to suit the specific needs identified for this meat processing environment.

The certificate II core modules were undertaken mostly off the job. These covered basic hygiene and quality assurance. By the end of the induction period trainees were assessed on knowledge of plant policy and procedure.

Further competencies were learned and assessed on site. The ATS co-ordinator maintained records of skill development.

Because of the way the industry worked, there was a reliance on the continual monitoring of supervisors. The supervisors had the content expertise and the current knowledge of practice. Once trainees went out into the various sections of the plant they covered the competencies that applied to each particular processing area. Their progress was monitored, observations were carried out and oral questioning was used to assess underpinning knowledge. Progress and assessment were discussed with trainees and supervisors. Supervisors maintained records of trainee progress as part of the quality assurance system established for the plant.

The final assessment decision was a joint one. The judgement about the achievement of unit of competency was made after discussion with the supervisor. If the supervisor felt that the trainee was competent, they would sign off that unit. The ATS co-ordinator verified the decision and updated the records.

Quality assurance strategies

The company supported some staff to undertake train-the-trainer and workplace assessor training. Several supervisors and shop floor employees were trained assessors. There was a plan for more assessors to be trained, and to refresh the skills of those who had already completed the training. The ATS co-ordinator had a Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training and there were approximately 16 to 18 people with training and assessment qualifications.

The overarching quality management system regulated by AQIS largely subsumed the assurance of the quality of any assessment carried out at this site. AQIS undertakes audits to ensure the maintenance of standards and product integrity in the industry. The focus was very much on quality assurance and the ramifications of ineffective training were recognised by staff. Trainees had to be observed performing to the required standards before supervisors would initial their record sheets. Confirmation of competence was determined collaboratively through observation, discussion and agreement between the supervisor, the ATS co-ordinator and the trainees themselves. Records of the dates and outcomes of assessment against competencies were maintained by the ATS co-ordinator.

Cargill Foods Australia was quite satisfied with the idea of external audits maintaining the quality of training and assessment. The employees were committed to the system of quality assurance. The concept of continuous improvement was also assisted by the clear link to the enterprise bargaining agreement and the classification structure.

Reflections on the partnership

From the enterprise perspective, the initial expectations of the relationship were well-matched by the experience. There was general acceptance by staff and the management that the process had been relatively easy to implement and maintain.

From the ATS perspective, the partnership was generally a good one. The need to be adaptable and flexible in this type of working relationship was seen to be very important. It was also recognised that the sheer size of the training program made it difficult to keep up with. Demands on time and the size of the workforce were major manageability problems.

Benefits to the organisations

From the point of view of the enterprise, the partnership was manageable, with only a little room for improvement. In relation to value for money and obtaining a quality outcome, the relationship was ranked highly. As one informant noted:

> *The company is pretty happy. We are looking one day being able to do it ourselves because there are some cost benefits if we do it ourselves. But as it is we are very happy with it.*

The biggest benefit for ATS-AQIS in this training relationship was ensuring the quality not only from the company point of view and the industry as a whole, but also for the new people that were

coming into the industry. They were being prepared to work competently in the industry. This type of training for the meat industry was very new.

Critical elements in the partnership

Trust was seen to be the most important element as far as the Cargill Foods Australia's staff was concerned. The relationship was easy and manageable because people trusted the key people involved in the partnership. The flexibility and credibility of personnel was also crucial. As the ATS representative was known and respected by the workers and management prior to the establishment of the partnership, the move to an auspiced assessment arrangement was a relatively smooth and most positive one.

Openness, honesty and good communication were the critical factors in making the partnership work as far as the ATS partner was concerned. It was also important to work with the process and adapt it slowly where necessary.

'Now we can see some tangible benefit'

National Foods and Goulbourn–Ovens Institute of TAFE

Partnership member details

Goulbourn–Ovens Institute of TAFE (GOIT) is a large regional provider of vocational education and training in Victoria. The institute's main campuses are located at Benalla, Seymour, Shepparton and Wangaratta. Satellite campuses also operate at Christensen's Lane, Wangaratta (Equine), at William Orr, Shepparton (Agriculture/Horticulture), at Park Lane, Wangaratta (Agriculture/Horticulture), and at Her Majesty's Prison at Dhurringile and Beechworth. The institute promotes its programs on a regional, state and national basis. Goulbourn–Ovens Institute of TAFE is in the centre of Victoria's food bowl and is a provider of training for the food industry across Australia.

National Foods is a listed public company formed in August 1991 and is one of the few remaining Australian-owned companies in the consumer dairy foods and beverage markets. The milk operations division is the most profitable one within National Foods, with milk making over 75% of the company's total profit.

The partnership arrangement covered ten sites across Australia; however, the site for this study was the Chelsea Heights plant.

Scope of qualifications and target audience

The range of qualifications provided at this site was:

- Certificate I, II, III and IV in Food Processing
- Certificate III in Communications (Call Centres)
- Certificate I and II Transport and Distribution (Warehousing)

The training service provided was targetted at all production employees and administration staff. Qualifications in the frontline management competencies were also proposed for the management staff. The training at this site was aligned to the EBA and therefore their classification structure. Assessment in the relevant competencies and the resultant certificate was then reflected in their wage levels. Employees are entitled to achieve higher qualifications than their job allows; however, they are only paid for the position that they fill.

Details of partnership

The memorandum of agreement to provide vocational education/training services existed between the two parties at a range of enterprise sites. A co-ordinator was situated at each site to co-ordinate the on-site training and assessment, to provide consultancy advice and to facilitate the transfer of data (outcomes) to GOIT. A training manager oversaw all sites.

The agreement covered:

- services provided
- underpinning principles (included principles valued by both partners)
- student contact hours (included fees and charges pertaining to fee for service or new apprenticeship/traineeship requirements)
- what each party would provide
- intellectual property
- protocols (which included lines of communications)
- assessment and reporting
- certification
- variation and cessation of the contract

- penalty clause (which included information regarding if other RTO training is required)
- indemnity (covering issues of insurance of property and personnel)
- dispute resolution
- remuneration (service fee)
- subcontracting arrangements
- role of GOIT training manager
- industry trainer's brief.

Either party could conclude the contract at a month's notice if it was not considered '*beneficial to continue*'.

Period of collaboration

The collaboration between the two organisations began in late 1998. The formal contract took only a few months to formalise from initial contact to the signing of the agreement, after which GOIT began to service and co-ordinate training at ten National Foods sites across five states.

Impetus for collaboration

Prior to this partnership National Foods was using a range of training organisations to provide training across their sites. None were on a long-term contract basis or had an established relationship. It was considered by National Foods that there was very little structure to the training. With some assistance from Goulbourn–Ovens Institute of TAFE, National Foods was able to 'structure not only the delivery but also the outcomes of training'.

Brief description of the training and assessment process

The employees were assessed up-front and then gap training was identified. Assessment tools were developed by the training co-ordinator in collaboration with identified content experts. Any training that could not be facilitated on the job was arranged and conducted on site. Trainers were accessed via GOIT in the first instance; however, training could also be organised utilising trainers external to both parties.

On-the-job assessments were conducted using an assessor and a content expert. Assessments could be conducted in one event or could be over time. Supervisors and then shift managers/unit managers/ senior operators in charge also needed to verify that they had observed the candidate in the workplace as being competent in the units of competency being assessed.

Quality assurance strategies

The key quality assurance strategies were:

- Assessment tools that were agreed to by all parties were developed. The assessment tools underwent extensive development involving consultation with content experts and floor managers, as well as being critiqued by peers and the training committee. The assessment tool(s) were trialled on the content expert prior to validation and use. The assessment tools were designed to serve two purposes: as a base line for recognition and then to be used later to check skill improvement of candidates. Assessment tools also identified areas for retraining. The consultation process associated with the development of the assessment tools was seen as lengthy; however, the two parties considered that careful development was crucial to the success of the training program.
- Information to assessors and to candidates was developed to support the assessment process and the parties involved. The information provided was developed at unit of competency level and contained both unit-specific information as well as general information relating to the assessment process.
- An on-site training committee (made up of the GOIT training co-co-ordinator, the National Foods site human resource manager and management, machine operators and dairy hands) was

established to ensure that the training met the commitments as specified in the enterprise bargaining agreement, and was relevant and appropriate. The committee also enabled an avenue for feedback from employees and ensured that the process was seen to be open and honest. The training committee established and clarified the roles of the workplace assessors, the content experts and the development of assessment tools, as well as developing and implementing a re-assessment policy and appeals process. Five members of this group also made up the appeals committee. The training committee was seen as a crucial quality assurance strategy and key communication strategy between both parties as well as the general National Foods personnel. However, concerns were raised regarding the 'make-up' and the lack of profile of the committee. Careful consideration regarding the consultation process for the selection of the members could have averted some concerns.

- Both parties considered the on-site training co-ordinator as an important quality assurance strategy. The training co-ordinator's role included:
  - training and co-ordination of training
  - enrolments and reporting to GOIT
  - course maintenance reporting and continuous improvement of programs including surveys
  - application for certification
  - liaising with site HR manager
  - record-keeping and document control
  - monthly written reports
  - recording of results and evidence for audit
  - reviewing and reporting of training performances
  - attending site committee meetings.

  Training co-ordinators from each of the sites met twice a year to look at issues they may have had on their sites, how they might have assisted each other and shared resources, 'so we are not reinventing the wheel at each site'. A key focus was to provide consistency in terms of delivery outcomes and delivery content across all sites. At this site, the training co-ordinator was also involved and had assisted in assessment tool development at other National Foods sites. Her role in communicating and driving the training program within and across sites was clearly evident to all parties. The network of co-ordinators was perceived as being extremely beneficial and manageable.
- The partnership being under constant review was cited as one of the key quality assurance strategies. An account management structure was in place and therefore a manager at GOIT specifically looked after this contract. This person reported to National Foods on a monthly basis regarding the level of training that had been undertaken, funding that had been secured and the outcomes of the training. The review meetings occurred at least twice a year and involved the Director of GOIT, the Account Manager and the National Foods National Employee Relations Manager. These reviews were seen as not only extremely cost-effective and manageable but also meant that the contractor understood the enterprise's business. As one informant noted:

  > *What happens then is everything is in tune with the direction our business is taking … they are able to service the requirements at an operational level more easily because they are aware of the strategic direction.*

  Having one provider co-ordinating the training and assessment allowed National Foods to:

  > *… have consistency across the states … to have a consistency of delivery of content and outcomes from a training perspective across all state.*

  In general, the time and effort put into up-front assessment tools and the slow but extensive development of these was seen as impeding the implementation of the program. The workers for whom the training was prepared saw the selection and training of assessors as essential for the acceptance and uptake of the program. As with the petrochemicals case in this study, the partnership used a two-stage assessment process using a team of assessors and validation of the judgements. Extensive ongoing contact and review of the project at various levels was considered a successful and non-intrusive strategy.

Reflections on the partnership

Each party was satisfied with the other's participation in the implementation of training and assessment. Both the site HR manager and the training co-ordinator considered that they could rely on each other to solve issues or work though problems together. They trusted each other's skills and commitment to the training program. Although the training co-ordinator was a GOIT staff member, the responsibility for the training program was theirs until their role and function 'becomes an integral part of the business'.

Professional development was considered essential for the training co-ordinators. They undertook training related to developing assessment tools and procedures to deepen their understanding of the assessment process. This training also included the provision of support materials and information to assist the assessment process. In addition, the importance of the provision of information to participants in the assessment process was recognised by the parties.

To ensure the appropriateness of the assessment documentation, the training co-ordinators spent a great deal of time understanding the manufacturing process and the machinery involved so as to adequately prepare documentation to support the assessments. The role of the training co-ordinators has changed over time. Following a review, they were given a more pro-active role of identifying training needs and sourcing training that would improve the provision of on-site training.

Benefits to the organisations

For National Foods, the partnership provided them with a partner which was skilled in training delivery, allowing them to focus on their core business. The cost to the organisation was seen as strategic spending which should have provided them with measurable outcomes. As one provider co-ordinated the training, it was seen to provide a consistent approach in terms of philosophy and content delivery. GOIT provided a centralised administrative function through which funding could be sought and administered.

For GOIT, the benefits were being the preferred provider for industry training for National Foods, as well as the positive impact the partnership had on their profile as a provider of training to enterprises within this industry. Both parties considered the relationship beneficial to their respective strategic plans.

Critical elements in the partnership

Both parties identified similar crucial elements in the alliance. The role of the key personnel and their relationship was perceived as being crucial to the partnership. Together they were said to form a strategic direction.

National Foods considered the 'right' GOIT co-ordinator was important, plus a willingness (of both parties) to make it work and keep the implementation progressing. With considerations of geographical location and content diversity, the communication requirements were significant. Hence the relationship between the National Employee Relations Manager and GOIT Account Manager was vital to the success of this partnership.

GOIT representatives acknowledged the support and input of the Human Resources Manager and noted that keeping the implementation moving and giving National Foods personnel the chance at formal recognition was important to the success of the partnership and the implementation of the training program.

'We used to have a traditional approach to training'

The New South Wales Department of Housing, the Sydney Institute of Technology and CIT Solutions, Canberra Institute of Technology

Partnership member details

The NSW Department of Housing has 2260 employees and manages the largest stock of public housing in Australia, with almost 134 000 dwellings valued at $13.1 billion in the property portfolio.

Sydney Institute of Technology is the largest provider of vocational education and training in Australia. It offers in excess of 700 courses and has an intake of around 50 000 students each year. With a commitment to flexibility and customer-centred delivery, training can be accessed through SIT in a wide range of modes and environments.

CIT Solutions Pty Limited is a subsidiary of the Canberra Institute of Technology, the major public provider of vocational education and training in the ACT. A registered training provider, the institute delivers training in the area of property and assets maintenance.

Scope of qualifications and target audience

The qualification offered under the terms of this partnership was the Certificate IV in Property Management (Public Housing) developed jointly by Canberra Institute of Technology and Sydney Institute of Technology. The certificate IV comprised nine national modules, eleven DoH modules and seven on the job extensions.

The target audience for the training were client service officers recruited to the Department of Housing as trainees. Three times a year, 32 trainees are brought in to train in a block. Some existing employees were offered the opportunity to have their skills and knowledge recognised through RPL.

To attain the certificate IV, candidates could either complete all of the modules and the on-the-job extensions to the required standard, or seek recognition on the basis that they could demonstrate the required skills and knowledge.

Details of partnership

The Department of Housing let a tender nationally for the training and assessment services. SIT and CIT submitted a joint proposal that was successful. For ease and simplicity, DoH wanted to deal directly with one organisation. Thus, the formal documentation supporting this partnership arrangement was a contract between the New South Technical and Further Education Commission (TAFENSW) through its Sydney Institute of Technology, and the Director-General of the NSW Department of Housing. Sydney Institute of Technology was the primary contractor in delivering entry-level training. The services of the Canberra Institute of Technology were contracted as and when required. A memorandum of understanding supported this arrangement.

The following components we covered in the SIT and DoH contract:

- the scope of the agreement
- additional services
- completion requirements
- the timetable and location of training and assessment
- payment
- contact persons
- copyright
- confidentiality

- occupational health and safety and liability
- relationship between the parties
- dispute resolution
- governing law
- authority

There were other schedules or operational agreements which covered the details of delivery, assessment and which partner was responsible for which parts of the program. These were negotiated between key members of the partnership on a more informal basis.

Period of collaboration

Negotiations to establish the collaboration between the parties were extensive and lengthy. This process allowed the DoH to clarify exactly what services they required and in what areas.

The partnership initially commenced in August 1997 without a formal arrangement in place. The contract was signed in April 1998 and covered an initial pilot period. However, the contract contained a clause which stated 'or later by mutual agreement' and on the basis of this, the collaboration continued.

Impetus for collaboration

For the DoH, the main influence on developing a training and assessment partnership was the desire to establish a system of training and development for employees. A 1993 review of the department initiated a refocus from houses to housing people, and there was recognition of the need to change the culture of the organisation to be more client-focussed.

Previously, new staff members were appointed following a selection interview. Most entered the workforce with no professional qualifications and they received only ad hoc initial training. A new enterprise bargaining agreement, however, identified requirements for training. The main option was to establish a very solid strategy that linked recruitment and training.

Hence, the collaboration was sought to meet the new demands for client focus and to fulfil the training requirements set down by the EBA. The main aim in implementing a structured training program was to develop a highly professional workforce for the department.

DoH developed and validated its own enterprise-based competency standards.

Along with the strong collaboration from SIT and CIT, there was full support for the new training approach from the Deputy Director-General for the Department of Housing and the Property Services Industry Training Body.

The major barrier was obtaining the additional funding needed to establish and maintain the strategy. There were also some initial set-up problems relating to the regulatory requirements for the traineeship system. Many of the DoH trainees could not be categorised as eligible trainees in the strictest sense because they already had qualifications. It took some time to work through these issues.

In addition, DoH needed to make changes to the curriculum to reflect innovations in the workplace. Flexibility was needed and curriculum change needed a period of time to be achieved.

Brief description of the training and assessment process

Recruits to the Department of Housing entered as trainees. They were provided with structured training and at the end of a twelve-month period they were made permanent employees. This was a novel approach that required NSW Public Sector Management Office approval.

Trainees may have had a month in a regional team before they came in to undertake their entry-level training. After two weeks of face-to-face training, they returned to their work team for some structured on-the-job training. During the first four weeks of structured training, they undertook the DoH modules which directly addressed the core business of the department. DoH staff delivered this training and assessed the trainees.

During the same period, either SIT or CIT trainers delivered two national modules.

After this initial training period, trainees returned to their teams and worked through a learning journal. The formal assessment linked to the day-to-day work they were carrying out in their workplaces. Each team had a coach or designated people that had the required expertise in particular areas.

During the 12 months, trainees returned to undertake more face-to-face training in other modules.

The learning journal covered the seven relevant work areas in which trainees were required to achieve competence. Competence was confirmed by coaches and team leaders and assessed by workplace assessors. Primary evidence was provided to the assessor by the team leader. Secondary evidence was documentary material provided by the candidate. Trainees completed an interview containing standard questions. All workplace assessors were provided with the workplace assessor information kit for the module they were assessing. This contained a set of models or expected answers for the standard questions. All assessors used these sheets to ensure that there was consistency from assessor to assessor and site to site.

Quality assurance strategies

The NSW Department of Housing had a large training department and trainers in all regions of the state. The workplace assessors in this program were all Department of Housing assessors and the workplace coaches were also departmental personnel. They had all been trained and held, as a minimum, the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

To support the introduction of the new training program, professional development sessions were conducted to ensure people understood the processes and had the ability to promote the program. SIT and CIT also conducted two-day workshops for all regional trainers. The focus of these sessions was on highlighting the differences between the traditional approaches to training and assessment and competency-based training and workplace assessment.

All partners collaborated to develop the assessment tools. They were trialled and validated in the south east region (Queanbeyan) of the state.

SIT and CIT planned to validate 5% of all workplace assessments. The process of validation was intended to involve assessors from both organisations conducting the assessments and evaluating the outcomes against other assessments.

Assessors met every quarter for a focus group. These were designed to work out any issues that may have arisen during training and assessment. In addition, the regional trainers and the DoH training department met quarterly and assessment issues were added to the standing agenda for the meetings.

For RPL assessments, CIT and SIT personnel undertook all the information sessions and all of the interviews. Thorough documentation was provided to candidates who applied for recognition. The application form for recognition of prior learning, Certificate IV in Property Management (Public Housing) included the following information:

- general information about the candidate and the candidate's experiences
- the relationship between candidate experience and the module for which they were seeking RPL
- the mechanisms for establishing candidate experience against the learning outcomes for the DoH modules contained in the certificate IV.

Candidates were also provided with details of the documentary evidence required for submission in support of their claim, as well as the requirements for the RPL interview. Candidates then summarise their evidence against the learning outcomes for modules in which they were seeking recognition.

It was seen to be a smooth process which allowed people to work efficiently through the booklet in their own time.

SIT and CIT assessors made RPL assessment decisions jointly. This provided them with the opportunity to double-check both the effectiveness of the processes and the accuracy and validity of the assessment decisions. There was agreement that consensus must be reached for a candidate to be granted recognition. In reviewing the approach, assessors ensured a high degree of consistency in the outcomes of assessment.

As another strand to their quality assurance approach, trainees were asked to evaluate the assessment process and provide written feedback using a standardised feedback sheet.

In this partnership, considerable emphasis was placed on the development of quality information to learners and assessors, standardised processes, tools and supporting assessment documentation. This material was the main strategy for the quality assurance of assessment. With some validation of assessment processes and decisions and ongoing professional development of staff, DoH and their partners had a degree of confidence in the quality of the training and assessment.

For the SIT co-ordinator, however, there was the suggestion that there was room for improvement with regard to the quality assurance. Workplace pressures can influence decisions on the assessment of recognition simply because managers need their staff trained and in the workplace doing their core business. Where staff had undertaken the training in the modules, there was likely to be more confidence in the quality of the outcomes.

Reflections on the partnership

From the perspective of the DoH, the program was very manageable and ran very smoothly. Accessibility and responsiveness were both seen as important and SIT and CIT were rated highly against these factors. The sharing of the work between the two training providers also allowed some cost savings and DoH considered that the organisation got a good return for the money they had expended. With regard to the quality of the outcome, it was rated highly. In reviewing the partnership, the DoH representative noted that it had been a terrific experience for DoH staff:

> *It really demonstrates to me how partnerships should work. We have become not only really good working partners; we have developed a very strong relationship between the key players. The DoH team has been enlarged by the SIT and CIT people. We do things as a team. It is quite seamless.*

In addition, the careful research undertaken by the partner RTOs meant that they understood the department as an organisation. The RTO people understood the organisational culture, the DoH language and the trainees. These were viewed as very important skills.

As the primary contractor in the partnership, much of the responsibility for the planning and management of delivery and assessment rested with SIT personnel. The program required the co-ordinator to enhance his skills in project management and also to build the skills of his team to ensure they were able to meet the demands of the requirements for planning and record-keeping in situations where short timeframes and flexible hours were required.

In the initial stages of the partnership, the two RTOs split the work of enrolling and record-keeping between them. This proved far too difficult to manage and a more sensible approach was adopted. The SIT team carried out all of the course management including enrolment, monitoring of candidate progress, keeping records of assessment results and graduation. The time required to set systems in place and manage the training meant that there were sometimes tensions between

the requirements of the partnership and the internal institute demands on the SIT team. From the beginning, some more hours needed to be allocated for co-ordination.

In addition, training was sometimes spasmodic. At first, part-time teachers with the necessary skills had to be found at short notice. After a period of time, a cluster of people with the right skills were put together who were able to work as required.

The SIT rating on the manageability of the whole process was relatively low. Partly this view was generated by the difficulty of responding flexibly from within a large bureaucracy with set systems and timeframes. Other concerns rested with the inability to keep close track of the progress of people through the training and assessment after they had completed the initial entry-level training.

In relation to the cost-effectiveness of the process, SIT benefitted generally from the partnership. The specific teaching department undertaking the work, however, tended to benefit less because of the increased workload that the partnership generated.

From the CIT perspective, there was great dependence upon the personalities of the key personnel in the relationship. They had considerable trust in each other and sometimes things were taken for granted.

Benefits to the organisations

For DoH, the benefits of the partnership were positive ones. The partnership provided them with trained staff and the training was tailored to the specific needs of the organisation. People who passed through the training received a qualification, which they previously had not. Articulation was thus now possible into higher education programs and this provided the department with an expansion or extension of their training possibilities.

Furthermore, the personnel who obtained the qualification were able to gain membership in the Chartered Institute of Housing in the United Kingdom. This built interest in Australia for the establishment of a similar housing institute in Australia. As one informant noted:

> *The outcomes are celebrated in a formal way. There is a graduation that is a significant event and the Minister attends.*

The NSW Department of Housing training team won the NSW Premier's Award for Excellence in May 1999 and in 2000 won the Employer of the Year in the Public Administration category of the National Training Awards.

There was a financial benefit to CIT given the size and the duration of the contracted project. At the same time, personnel gained considerably in relation to professional development. Skills and knowledge were extended in the areas of coaching and mentoring people through change, and other work came to the institute because this expertise was developed. The housing project exposed a lot of teachers to new situations and experiences and the professional development was strong for all involved.

A further benefit to CIT occurred as a result of the close association with SIT. There was a strengthening of the working relationship between the two RTOs.

Critical elements in the partnership

From the point of view of the DoH representative, trust is the crucial element that a partnership needs. The people involved in the collaboration needed to communicate openly and honestly, be prepared to take risks and also have a clear understanding of the ultimate aim of the activity. As one informant noted:

You need to have agreement on where you are going. This does not mean that you have to have agreement on how to get there, because that is where lots of ideas come in. But you have to have a shared vision.

From the SIT perspective, the critical elements were having a single contact person with the authority to make decisions within the client organisation. In addition, there needed to be sensible lines of communication drawn up and a strategy for anticipating the problems as they were encountered. As one informant noted:

If you can identify some of the problems up front and are able to work through the consequences, then you can set up the right systems from the beginning.

For CIT, the critical elements in the partnership were also trust and open communication. In addition, torch bearers were seen to be vital to ensure that projects such as this are achievable. Legislation or enterprise bargaining agreements that drove the process and forced a commitment also helped keep partnerships on track.

'Integrity is really important'

Santos and East Gippsland Institute of TAFE

Partnership member details

Santos was founded in 1954 by a group of Adelaide businessmen who believed that South Australia and the Northern Territory had potential for oil and gas. It has grown to be one of Australia's major energy providers, with interests throughout the nation and overseas. With its joint venturers it meets over one-third of the demand for domestic gas in Australia, as well as producing significant quantities of oil and petroleum liquids. In short, Santos explores, produces and markets oil and gas.

Santos Queensland and the Northern Territory Business Unit (QNTBU) encompass approximately 500 employees in Queensland and Northern Territory. Approximately half are based in Brisbane, with the remainder over 13 remote sites in the south-western corner of Queensland and central Northern Territory. Workers at these remote sites work a roster of two weeks on/two weeks off.

South East Australian Training Services (SEATS) is East Gippsland Institute of TAFE's commercial affiliate, specialising in the provision of competency-based vocational education and training services to a range of industries. Its profile of services includes:

- skills audits and training needs analyses for the workplace
- review and development of competency-based training systems
- development of enterprise competency standards
- alignment of enterprise competency standards with national qualifications
- provision of an RTO service
- development of learning/assessment strategies to integrate training within the workplace
- project management
- design and development of competency-based training resources (paper-based and interactive)
- facilitation of customised and/or accredited training programs.

Its team includes training consultants, technical writers, instructional designers, graphic artists, specialist industry trainers and group facilitators.

Scope of qualifications and target audience

The qualifications within the auspiced assessment arrangement were those that related to the Chemical, Hydrocarbons and Oil Refining Training Package, up to certificate IV level.[1] The focus of the arrangement was 'the operational staff, our fitters and our maintenance people, the electricians and first line supervisors, site managers, operators'. The enterprise training requirements for maintenance personnel extended only to certificate II level. Unlike maintenance staff, operations personnel did not have formal qualifications that aligned to their 'discipline'. The Chemical, Hydrocarbons and Oil Refining Training Package (to which the Santos enterprise standards align) was formed around operational competencies.

Assessments were conducted against the enterprise competencies (developed in collaboration with SEATS) that were mapped to the nationally endorsed competencies.

[1] PMA10198–PMA40198 Certificates I–IV

Details of partnership

The auspiced agreement appeared as a schedule to the contract between Santos (QNTBU) and East Gippsland Institute of TAFE (SEATS). It was considered a service agreement as 'in this case there was no capital being invested from the other partner.'

The agreement covered:

- service standards; this section outlined the service standards adhered to by East Gippsland Institute of TAFE
- roles and responsibilities; this section outlined the roles and responsibilities of both partners
  - East Gippsland Institute of TAFE (via South East Australian training Services): quality assurance advice, moderation and auditing, information updates of national changes, student records administration and ongoing management, credentialling and issuing of qualifications and consultation regarding future programs
  - Santos (QNTBU): delivery of programs (training and assessment), provision of job coaching and mentoring, provision of facilities, ensuring trainers and assessors meet national requirements
- processes and protocols; this section outlined each partner's role for the following items:
  - training
  - assessment
  - matching and recording
  - credentialling
  - archiving
  - maintenance
- compliance audits (quality assurance); this section outlined the requirements the annual audit would address
- fees and charges; this section outlined the fees and charges per year, per student and for moderation/audit
- terms of agreement; this section outlined the period for which the agreement applied.

Period of collaboration

The auspicing agreement grew out of an ongoing training and consultancy relationship between Santos and East Gippsland Institute of TAFE. Although the servicing relationship had been in existence for some time, the auspicing aspect of the relationship was the final stage of training implementation. The servicing relationship involved the development of enterprise competencies, the mapping of these to the nationally endorsed competencies, training of assessors and the development of training resources. The formal agreement for the auspicing phase of the service relationship was for five years.

Impetus for collaboration

Santos' operations in Queensland and the Northern Territory have grown significantly in the past decade. Much of this growth has been the result of a program of acquisition. A number of businesses were brought together under one operation, each of them with their own way of training people, different payroll systems, different HR systems and different operation philosophies. The organisation wanted to structure a system for the operational staff to work within one training system. The organisation identified the ability to develop enterprise-based competencies and link it back to the national framework (competencies).[2] There were two in-house awards with their own wage classification structures (five levels and six levels). These classifications were reinterpreted, not changed. The basic framework was accepted and the in-house competencies were matched. The in-house competencies were then mapped back to the nationally endorsed competencies for recognition within the AQF.

[2] The training package for this industry was at this time not endorsed.

Brief description of the training and assessment process

The in-house competencies were developed and matched against job roles. This took about four to five months. To implement the system took about a year. As one informant noted:

> *... it was a big decision, A) there was a lot of capital and B) it was going to cause a lot of change in the workplace, so we needed to make sure we were committed to it.*

Training and self-assessment checks and some knowledge tests against the enterprise competencies occurred online. This was supported by an extensive 'learning management system'. A series of draft online training resources were prepared in collaboration (by Santos and SEATS). These included: learner resources, trainer's package, coaching guide, unit guide and assessment resources. These resources were accessed via the learner management system. The resources developed for each unit of competency varied according to the learning and assessment strategy employed. They provided important distinctions between roles of key personnel in trainers, coaches and assessors—different products were designed and developed to meet the needs of each of these stakeholders.

Potential training options were grouped according to job roles. Candidates could elect to begin training in a unit via the learner management system. Records of progress and completion were available through this system as well.

Final assessments were conducted by utilising field-based tasks with work practice checklists. Results were entered electronically and then transferred to hard copy for personnel files (held centrally).

Initially, frontline supervisors were the assessors within the system, but the company then began to move towards using peers (trained assessors) as well as evidence collectors to facilitate the process ... 'to protect the integrity the final assessment decision will be still made by the front line supervisor'.

Quality assurance strategies

The ongoing quality assurance strategy documented in the agreement and utilised by SEATS was that of compliance audits. Compliance audits were to be conducted annually to ensure that the 'training product and service' was consistent with that of the institute's. The audit covered the following standards:

- training delivery
- training support
- assessment.

Santos considered that the audits encompassed not only a 'paper trail' check but also some form of verification (observation of assessments being conducted). SEATS considered the use of moderation as being part of the audit review. However, this was not clear within the agreement. In addition, the training and assessment process was structured within Santos' quality management system and was therefore internally reviewed or audited regularly.

Regardless of the agreement, a series of quality assurance strategies were embedded in the relationship. These were:

- development of enterprise competencies
- alignment of these to nationally endorsed competencies
- trained assessors
- development of a range of resources (learner resource, trainer package, coaching guide, unit guide and assessment resource booklets).

The online training management system (including record-keeping) was costly to implement but considered essential to the overall effectiveness of training for such a dispersed workforce. The training and assessment materials were developed and reviewed on an ongoing basis. The

enterprise competencies, the alignment to nationally endorsed competencies and the development of a range of resources were all undertaken and agreed by both parties. Potential assessors were identified by both parties and trained by SEATS.

The quality assurance of the system was considered to be highly manageable and cost-effective by both parties.

Reflections on the partnership

Santos frontline supervisors, as well as a number of other key personnel, undertook professional development in competency-based training and assessment. The careful selection of these personnel was considered extremely important to the integrity of the system, resulting in personnel considered by their peers as being highly skilled.

Momentum was seen by Santos as important to the uptake, acceptance and progress of the program. Santos viewed distance as being one of the key factors in the progress of the implementation of the competencies. They considered face-to-face contact or more presence in the company of the SEATS key personnel as being an impetus for moving forward in the program '... face-to-face communication is really important ... one week we seem to launch forward and then we slow down because of the distance'. They viewed the skills and ability of key personnel at SEATS as being crucial to the ongoing relationship. In addition, due to the dispersed nature of the workforce, the internal requirements of the enrolment and recording process of the RTO, as well the requirement to keep hard-copy records, were seen as creating an unnecessary burden on the recognition process.

Both parties were satisfied with the other's participation in the implementation of training and assessment. It was considered 'a great partnership'.

Benefits to the organisations

The partnership allowed the enterprise to focus on its core business and the RTO to provide product development and maintenance as well as consultancy, training, and assessment services. The auspiced assessment and the fees and charges attached to this relationship were minor by comparison to the services provided by the RTO under this agreement.

Critical elements in the partnership

Santos considered that the most crucial aspect in the alliance was the RTO's knowledge and experience of workplace training and assessment and of the industry; that is, a high-risk workplace. Of equal importance was the quality of the product produced by the RTO as well as the trust each partner had in each other.

SEATS considered that the high level of commitment of the enterprise and its willingness to put extensive resources behind the commitment to be crucial to the alliance. They also considered the person driving the implementation to be vital to success. Their ability to be able to see the vision and to share that with others (including the RTO) was important to the overall success of the program and to the uptake within the enterprise. This vision included keeping it simple and making the system easy to use while ensuring the program could deliver the desired outcomes.

'You have to have commitment'

University of Ballarat and Kilmany Family Care

Partnership member details

Kilmany Family Care is an agency of the Uniting Church which oversees children's services in the East Gippsland area. Services include: financial counselling, family counselling, home-based care, tenancy advice, consumer advice, a supported accommodation assistance program, family day care, family support and creative respite options.

The University of Ballarat is a multi-sector university operating over five campuses across western Victoria. These campuses are located at Mount Helen, Ballarat, Ararat, Stawell and Horsham. The university has international campuses in Hong Kong, Singapore, and China. The University of Ballarat has an extensive history in providing distance and flexible learning.

Scope of qualifications and target audience

The qualification being delivered in the partnership was the Diploma of Community Services (Childcare). This course was a Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) funded project that started in 1998 and finished in August 2000. The University of Ballarat was contracted to deliver this diploma to eight locations across Victoria for thirty-one Aboriginal childcare workers. Delivery sites included: Lake Tyers is in East Gippsland, Shepparton, Mooroopna, Echuca, Mildura, Robinvale, Swan Hill and Thornbury (metropolitan Melbourne). These childcare workers were, for the most part, employed in the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), although two of the original group were employed in mainstream services as support workers for Koori children.

The Child Care Services Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy aimed to provide training in the diploma and to support measures that would increase access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander childcare assistants to permanent employment within the industry.

Details of partnership

The partnership was established as a teaching agreement with Kilmany Family Care. Kilmany Family Care had to go through a selection process, with four of their staff interviewed along with a number of other people, for the positions to deliver training and assessment services on behalf of the University of Ballarat in East Gippsland. The agreement was renegotiated for each year of the course. However, all agreements covered the following points:

- program objectives
- program content
- training strategies
- expected outcomes
- program costings
- terms of agreement
- payment schedule and conditions
- general (which included issues such as insurance and copyright)
- termination.

Period of collaboration

The negotiation period did not cover an extended period of time. Interviews for teaching staff were conducted in August of 1998 and the agreement with Kilmany Day Care for teaching services was signed in late October or early November. Teaching started in the first week of November.

Throughout the negotiations and throughout the program, money was the biggest issue. As one informant noted:

> *Our resources were fairly limited, we didn't want to spend twice as much in that areas as we were in other areas. But on the other hand what looked like sufficient funding turned out not to be as sufficient as it could have been.*

The collaboration only continued to the end of the funded project.

Impetus for collaboration

The impetus for the collaboration of the University of Ballarat was to access teaching services across Victoria and in this case, East Gippsland. By utilising Kilmany Family Care it also enabled a support service for a particularly disadvantaged group of students.

For Kilmany Family Care the impetus was to work with a disadvantaged group in their area and to provide broader experience for their staff. In addition, Kilmany Family Care had the facilities to provide a childcare centre for the students' work placements.

The relationship had to work within the boundaries (legal and time lines) as stipulated by the funding body for the project. The original funded project did not include the logistical problems of using another organisation as a partner. These issues needed to be worked out carefully not just at the start of the project but had to continue throughout its duration to ensure that all parties benefitted. However, both the University of Ballarat project co-ordinator and the Kilmany Family Care manager were eager for the partnership to work.

The project was fraught with cross-cultural issues which posed problems for trainers and material developers throughout the program. Travel to and from the teaching facility (outside the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust site) for the trainers also presented an unforseen logistical and financial burden.

Brief description of the training and assessment process

The training delivery was specifically designed to address the needs of the Aboriginal students. In general, training took place in rooms adjacent to the childcare centres. Students studied two full days per week. These days were selected in consultation with the childcare centre co-ordinators, students and teaching staff.

Two day care placements (one 12-day and one 20-day) were undertaken in mainstream children's services. The maternity placement was undertaken in various settings, including maternal and child centres and hospitals.

The University of Ballarat provided pre-developed study materials. However, these were not always culturally sensitive. To provide an Aboriginal perspective, handouts and case studies supplemented the materials. Assessment tools were specifically developed for the target group by University of Ballarat staff and the trainers. All trainers within the project could access the library facilities of University of Ballarat.

Students who had substantial work experience with a range of age groups were assessed for RPL for their first-year placement. A University of Ballarat representative who had RPL assessor training oversaw this element of the project.

The University of Ballarat project co-ordinator managed the project, especially overseeing the reporting and recording functions, ensuring targets/timelines were met, developing and presenting three trainer in-services programs, providing professional development and support, providing assessment instrument development and sharing, as well as travelling to each site and holding regular meetings and providing assistance.

Quality assurance strategies

A variety of quality assurance strategies were employed throughout the project:

- All teaching staff were selected in consultation with the communities receiving training to ensure the target group accepted trainers and that they demonstrated cross-cultural awareness and sensitivities. The project co-ordinator and others saw the teachers as dedicated, flexible and committed to the success of the students. Careful selection was seen quite clearly as a quality assurance strategy.
- The University of Ballarat project co-ordinator had an overview of the training delivery and assessments conducted and so became a moderator of delivery and assessment strategies, as well as assisting in the consistency of the assessment judgements across the sites. There was a high level of phone and email contact between the University of Ballarat project co-ordinator and the distance teachers and/or co-ordinators. Newsletters were distributed amongst the stakeholders to facilitate the dispersion of information and also to provide an avenue for sharing ideas.
- The University of Ballarat provided the assessment materials; however, the teachers adapted these to suit the specific needs of the target group. Kilmany Family Care considered the assessments 'very well laid out'.
- Three in-service sessions were conducted for staff over the two-year period. These were considered useful in terms of disseminating information regarding the record-keeping and administrative requirements of a large organisation. They also provided a valuable forum to discuss issues and challenges associated with the project. Trainers shared approaches to problem resolution, resources, and ideas for modifying course content and assessment to ensure an appropriate cultural perspective. Various support agencies attended to provide support and advice; for example, the Aboriginal Education Centre Manager and the Head of School, Health, Social and Community Studies. Because of the nature of the project and difficulty of people working in isolation it was considered critical having people get together, to work through issues, to support staff, as well as to maintain quality and consistency of outcomes.
- Meetings were held at each location every three months. These regular meetings provided a much-needed opportunity to gather and hear feedback from everyone involved: students, centre co-ordinators, tutors and the project co-ordinator.
- A steering committee comprised of representatives from all stakeholders met every three months in Ballarat to ensure the project outcomes were met.
- A survey was posted to all participants and employers (centre co-ordinators/kindergarten teachers) and the results were collated. This survey provided a summative review of the project.

In this case, the project co-ordinator maintained the consistency of application across the delivery sites. Her ongoing support of the teaching staff and the project was crucial to the confidence and acceptance by all parties of the assessment judgements. As the collaboration took place over a defined period of time, the review processes were undertaken at the end of the program, rather than on an ongoing basis as in the other projects.

In general, the University of Ballarat project co-ordinator considered the quality assurance strategies to be most effective. However, in terms of value for money, all staff went beyond the terms of the contract to ensure a positive outcome for the project. Kilmany Family Care saw the quality assurance strategies as 'very manageable and it was just fairly necessary too'.

Reflections on the partnership

Some professional development was considered essential for the Kilmany Family Care staff even though they had teaching backgrounds. The teachers undertook in-service activities not only in effective teaching and assessment strategies for competency-based delivery, but also in working with Koori culture. For both parties it was considered an important learning experience.

Barriers to the success of the project were the level of adequate funding, especially establishing the costs related to travel time/logistics and use of infrastructure. A willingness to understand each other's issues and mutual respect for each other, then finding a median, was seen as an important

factor in realising the project outcomes. Constantly reviewing the needs of the parties and being willing to adapt and change were considered by both parties as extremely important.

The distance between the RTO and the agency posed issues of its own and the provision of facilities such as email, an 1800 number and distance access to University of Ballarat facilities (that is, library) were seen as vital to the overall success of the project and the relationship.

Benefits to the organisations

The key benefit to the University of Ballarat was the successful completion of the project and the development of an extensive network that could be accessed again if needed. For Kilmany Family Care, participation in the project provided staff with increased funded working hours, professional development and experience in the teaching field, and an established network and relationship that could be utilised at a later date, as well as enabling the agency to respond to an identified need within their community.

Critical elements in the partnership

The University of Ballarat project co-ordinator considered that commitment to achieving the outcomes, an effective working relationship between the RTO and the agency, a good level of communication between the parties and the willingness to 'nut through the issues' as being the most critical elements of the alliance. 'You have to be able to talk to each other, without getting defensive.' The University of Ballarat informant considered that the Kilmany Family Care personnel 'went beyond the terms of the contract for what we budgeted for'.

The Kilmany Family Care co-ordinator considered the critical elements to the success of the project were communication, flexibility and an adequate budget, plus a willingness and commitment to address identified inequalities within the Koori community in East Gippsland: 'you have got to have a commitment to what you are doing. You have to see the value of it and want it to really happen.'

Appendix C: VET-in-Schools programs

Schools as registered training organisations

VET-in-Schools refers to accredited training programs or training package qualifications that are delivered by secondary schools and colleges. In the majority of Australian states, schools can become RTOs and deliver industry-specific training programs leading to VET qualifications in their own right. Under these circumstances, schools are required to meet the same standards for quality training and assessment as any other RTO.

Schools may also choose to undertake the training and assessment under the auspices of a public or private RTO. The RTO is responsible for the quality assurance of the training and assessment delivered by the school. In New South Wales, the school districts, rather than the individual school, are the RTOs and the responsibility for assuring the quality of the outcomes resides with the district superintendent.

Policy supporting partnerships

Since the implementation of the Australian Training Framework in 1998, most state and territory governments have formulated policy on VET-in-Schools programs. The value of schools entering into partnerships with public or private RTOs is emphasised in these policies. For example, the Tasmanian Department of Education's *Vocational education and training in schools framework policy*[3] outlines the benefits of school and RTO linkages, while Queensland's Department of Education and Training joint policy statement, *Vocational education and training in schools: Future directions*[4] says of co-operation:

> *This is advantageous to schools in terms of meeting the human and physical resource requirements of VET courses, and results in efficiencies through sharing resources and facilities.* (TAFE QLD 2000)

Policies in other states reflect similar views. Partnerships are therefore seen as a sensible way of achieving positive outcomes from delivery of VET-in-Schools programs across Australia.

Resources supporting collaborative arrangements

South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia are three states which have developed comprehensive resources to support the establishment of collaborative arrangements between schools and RTOs. In each instance, the resources are available via a specific website. This allows teachers and administrators ready access to the materials, regardless of geographic location.

The extent of coverage and detail of these resources are outlined below.

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[3] Department of Education 2000, *Vocational education and training in schools framework policy*, www.opcet.tas.gov.au/vet/VETinSchoolsFrameworkPolicy.htm [accessed: November 2000].

[4] Department of Education and Training 2000, *Vocational education and training in schools: Future directions*, joint policy statement, www.training.qld.gov.au/reports/vetsch.pdf [accessed: November 2000].

South Australia

The website for VET-in-Schools Agreements (VISA) is located at: www.tafe.sa.edu.au/vet_div/irsi/VISA (DETE 1999).

The site provides access to the *Operations manual for school and TAFE SA institute staff*. This document outlines a brief history of VISAs which, in fact, precede the introduction of auspicing with the implementation of the Australian Recognition Framework in 1998.

The South Australian manual contains information on the steps for both school and institute personnel in establishing a VET-in-Schools agreement. Within these steps are important issues about establishing partnerships and potential partners are encouraged to give careful consideration to these.

For schools, these steps involve consideration of the following:

- researching and planning, by contacting key stakeholders such as the school VET adviser, a TAFE institute, the relevant ITAB and local industry networks
- checking for the availability of VET curriculum, training packages, learning resource materials
- making the decision about whether the school will seek to be an RTO in its own right, engaging a TAFE institute to deliver the training or deliver the under the auspices of a TAFE institute
- identifying the professional development needs of staff
- setting up the formal documentation of the VISA
- implementing the agreed quality assurance plan
- registering the VISA
- managing student results and certification.

There are supporting resources provided for many of these steps. They take the form of additional information, documentation and templates of relevant proformas that can be used by schools.

The processes set out for institute VET contacts involve:

- identifying a training program or curriculum suitable for delivery by schools under the auspices of an institute
- discussing roles, responsibilities and requirements of the VISA
- consulting on curriculum and quality assurance arrangements
- providing advice regarding qualifications needed by staff delivering and/or assessing VET
- completing the schedules related to content, quality assurance requirements and the summary of obligations
- monitoring implementation of quality assurance plans
- providing advice and/or facilitating professional development as required for institute staff and school staff
- formalising and registering the agreement
- receiving results and arranging certification
- checking the terms of the agreement (three years) and renegotiating.

A series of questions and answers are also provided which are cross-referenced to other sections and resources in the manual. These focus on what are likely to be frequently asked questions.

The requirements for quality assurance are also clearly set out. The strategies are outlined in a quality assurance plan that is attached as a schedule. The quality assurance plan generally covers the following elements of delivery and assessment:

- the resources required to deliver and assess the program described in schedule A to the VISA, which include:
  - equipment
  - training materials/facilities
  - assessment materials

- suitably qualified personnel
- relevant training packages and/or accredited documents and support materials

- the school's ability to:
  - design/adapt training based on modules or competencies from training packages
  - use a variety of delivery techniques.

Further consideration is to be given to whether the school has assessment practices to meet the requirements of the program as stipulated by the VET modules or training package(s); systems for keeping accurate records to enable the RTO to issue statements of attainment or qualifications and continuous improvement strategies to ensure that standards are maintained and continuously improved.

Additional information is given on the specific roles and responsibilities of each of the stakeholders in the quality assurance process including the school VET co-ordinator, the VET-in-Schools contact, the state program manager and the program group subject specialist or module adviser. Emphasis is placed on approval of assessment plans and dissemination of information about quality assurance requirements to the relevant parties.

Detailed advice is then provided on modifying an auspicing agreement, on registering students and on dealing with student results.

With the inclusion of proformas and exemplars and key contacts, this manual is a comprehensive resource for those preparing to enter into a VET-in-Schools agreement. Many aspects could be adapted to suit any auspiced assessment arrangement.

Victoria

As in South Australia, information and resources to support the development of auspiced arrangements are available via the internet in Victoria.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (formerly the Board of Studies) website explains the options that schools have in the delivery of VET and outlines the aspects of provision that need to be discussed prior to establishing a partnership. These include:

- content to be covered
- costs for the program
- logistics of student attendance and timetabling
- enrolment and the recording of student results
- requirements of work, attendance, assessment, discipline, in relation to VET and Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) so that partners are clear about expectations
- strategies for liaison and communication on student progress
- details of work placement and issues of co-ordination between placement, the school and the VET provider.

Further information is provided which focusses more on the potential cultural differences that may be raised in partnership arrangements. It is suggested that some of the key issues for the RTO might relate to student understanding of different curriculum and work expectations, and RTO teachers understanding the connections between VET and the VCE.

For the schools, one significant issue is ensuring that VET programs are equally valued in the school and on the timetable. Others relate to finding ways to release students from school for training and ensuring quality information is provided to students, parents, and employers. For school teachers, having the RTO staff assist them in understanding competency-based training and assessment and being able to access relevant professional development are vital.

Another Victorian website that contains comprehensive information on setting up partnerships is VISNET at www.visnet.edu.au (DEET 2000). Designed to support the key players involved in the delivery of VET-in-Schools, the site is maintained by the Department of Education Employment and Training.

Under the heading 'Why Partnerships?' it is stated:

> *Partnership arrangements between secondary schools and external Registered Training Organisation (RTO) can provide schools and senior secondary students with access to a range of external programs, resources, facilities and expertise.*

Partnerships increase the breadth of training experiences, environments and learning modes available to students in a cost effective way. There are clear and measurable advantages for all involved. In this era of competition, it is important to promote strategies that ensure successful partnerships can exist and continuous improvement can occur.

The range of partnership arrangements is discussed, including the RTO providing all of the training and assessment, the school and the RTO sharing the delivery, or the school delivering under the auspices of the RTO.

To assist in making this choice, the following points are raised for consideration:

- the capacity (of the school alone) to meet the resource requirements of RTO status and those specified in the training package or accredited curriculum
- the cost-effectiveness of provision as an RTO versus the cost of using an external RTO
- the ability to offer students a range of appropriate training situations.

The next section gives a clear explanation of the role of a memorandum of understanding and each step in the process of establishing a partnership is outlined. Issues that should be considered at each step are set out, together with sources for additional information.

Under step 1: Determine program and resource requirements, the issues for consideration are highlighted by the following prompt questions:

- What programs are available?
- What resources are required for each program?
- Where are the resources available?
- What costs will be incurred?
- How will school co-ordinate its participation in VETIS?
- Do staff need professional development?
- Do we have the capacity to deliver?

Against each of these questions are other resources which can be accessed to assist in the decision-making process.

Step 2 contains a series of questions that will help partners determine the program structure, while the step 3 checklist assists in the identification of areas that must be covered when negotiating a memorandum of understanding (MOU). To assist in step 3, a set of sample MOUs are included as a resource.

Western Australia

Guidelines were put together in Western Australia to support the development of partnership arrangements between schools and RTOs under the 1998 Australian Recognition Framework. These guidelines explain generally the National Training Framework, training packages and the regulatory framework provided by the ARF.

The document also explains the roles and responsibilities of RTOs and schools in the delivery of VET and introduces the concept of partnerships by identifying the benefits of entering into such alliances.

Among other advantages, the value of partnerships for schools and students are:

- providing access to staff with vocational training and industry expertise
- accessing up-to-date training equipment from RTOs
- providing increased links with local employers and industry
- increasing the alignment between schools and the VET sector.

For RTOs, the benefits include:

- building closer relationships with schools and business
- providing pathways and better articulation for students from the school sector to the VET sector.

For industry and enterprises, the advantages include the building of stronger links between schools and RTOs.

The guidelines then identify the key stakeholders in the partnership arrangements and outline the roles of the school, the RTO, the school system, the Curriculum Council, the Training Accreditation Council and industry. As in the Victorian documentation, the possible partnership models are described, ranging from the RTO delivering all of the training and assessment, through to the RTO quality-assuring the training delivery and assessment.

A comprehensive checklist for an auspiced arrangement is included, which is similar to those developed in Victoria and South Australia.

The suggested steps in the Western Australian process are:

- access industry advice to identify industry training needs (sources of such information are provided)
- link industry advice to the needs of the students, the availability of resources and funding, and the linkages of the VET curriculum to the WA Certificate of Education (WACE)
- select the training to be delivered, including consultation with school sector/system
- identify and select RTOs and discuss the training to be delivered
- obtain relevant training package or accredited curriculum, with assistance from RTOs or industry bodies
- negotiate partnership arrangement with RTO, including the arrangements for training delivery and assessment
- identify and obtain all necessary learning and teaching resources
- identify and ensure availability of appropriate physical resources and equipment; costs for industry areas vary depending on equipment needs, consumables and hours of training
- establish and agree on costs and charges involved in the delivery of the program
- finalise the partnership agreement with the RTO, specifying the responsibilities of each partners
- follow all quality assurance standards for the delivery and assessment as required by the RTO
- submit details of student results to the Curriculum Council by the deadline for inclusion in the student's statement of results and to contribute to the WACE
- submit details of student results to RTO for VET statement of attainment or qualification.

Further, the documentation includes a suggested proforma that provides a simple outline for a formal agreement covering training and assessment, costs and recognition. Useful contacts and websites are also included as part of the guidelines.

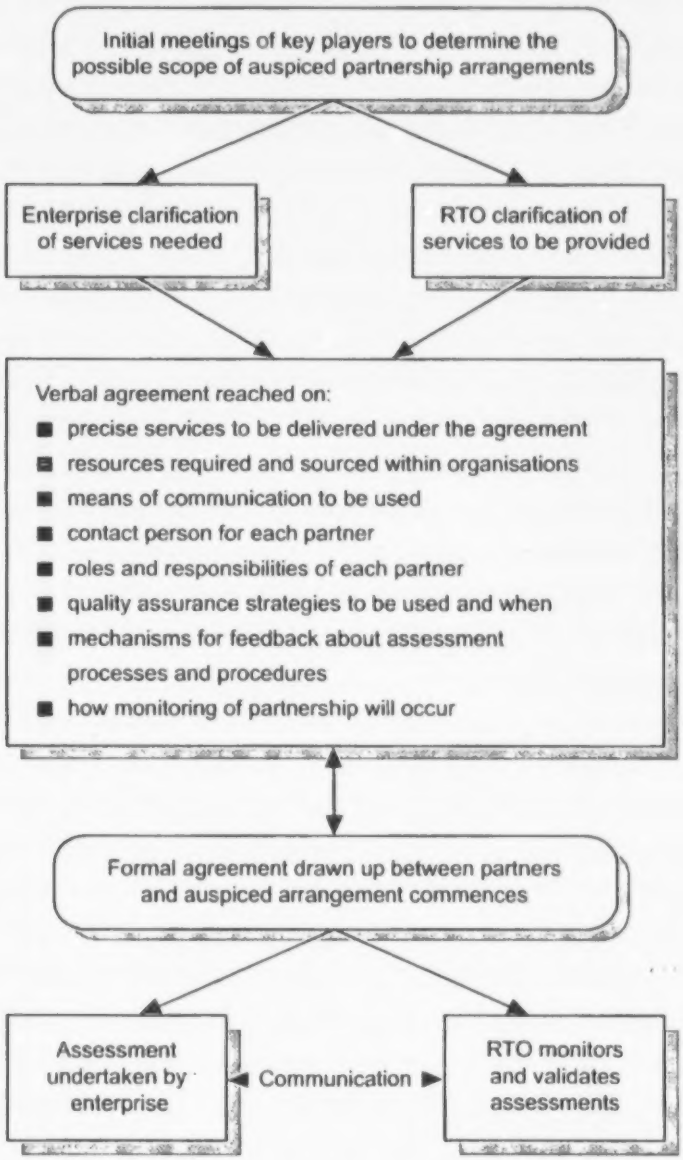
Although the Western Australian documentation was produced in 1998, it remains the key information source on collaborative partnerships between schools and RTOs in the state.

Documenting collaboration in VET-in-Schools

While policies and procedures may vary from state to state and territory to territory, there is a reasonably consistent approach to how partnerships are developed in South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. Information is available online together with checklists, exemplars and proformas detailing the steps for both schools and RTOs in formulating an agreement to work together. These documents are useful tools for others planning to enter into similar relationships.

Appendix D: Preliminary negotiation flowchart

Figure 2: Preliminary negotiation flowchart


Initial meetings of key players to determine the possible scope of auspiced partnership arrangements
Enterprise clarification of services needed
RTO clarification of services to be provided
Verbal agreement reached on:
precise services to be delivered under the agreement
resources required and sourced within organisations
means of communication to be used
contact person for each partner
roles and responsibilities of each partner
quality assurance strategies to be used and when
mechanisms for feedback about assessment processes and procedures
how monitoring of partnership will occur
Formal agreement drawn up between partners and auspiced arrangement commences
Assessment undertaken by enterprise
Communication
RTO monitors and validates assessments

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Appendix E: Research documentation

Auspiced assessment interview schedule—RTO

This document was provided to RTO representative/s prior to interview and used by the interviewers as a questioning and recording sheet.

Characteristics of partners

Size

Location

Industry area

Overview of core business

Impetus for collaboration (enterprise) prior to this arrangement

Antecedent conditions

Prior to this arrangement did you have any contact in regard to training and assessment? If so what?

Initial reasons for seeking collaboration

Did you seek collaboration? Yes/No

What were your reasons for seeking collaboration?

Establishment

How long did it take you to from the first thought to signing the agreement?

Who was involved in the negotiations?

Organisation 1

Organisation 2

RTO

Is it a formal agreement?

If there is a formal documentation, such as a contract or memorandum of understanding, or handshake?

If there is documentation:

What was it?

Who were the signatories?

How long is the agreement meant to last for?

Drivers?

Barriers?

Assessment focus

Scope i.e. Qualifications/competencies

Industry area

AQF level/units

Purpose

Industry entry

Multiskilling/PD

Recognition (AQF)

Legislation

Licensing

Key features of formal arrangements

Formal documentation/informal agreement on:

- Purpose
- Roles and responsibilities
- Access to assessments
- Information to candidates
- Information to assessors
- Processes and procedures
- Record-keeping
- Appeals/grievances
- Marketing
- Costing
- Quality assurance strategies

Skills and experience of partners

Previous experience

Were you involved in partnership arrangements before?

Developmental needs

Have you done anything since the partnership to build the skills of your people to meet the requirements of this?

Strategies for support

What strategies have you set in place to support the activities involved in the partnership? (Have you done assessor training? Computer training? Database development? Resource material development?)

Quality assurance strategies

Description of the quality assurance strategies

What you do to ensure that the assessment is OK?

Justification for the choice(s)

Why did you choose this strategy?

What are options did you think of?

Responsibility for the decision

Who decided in the end, what strategy(ies) to use?

Issues related to resource requirements including time, personnel, cost

What things did you have to put in place? Such as time, money, people

Manageability and cost effectiveness

On a scale of 1–5 (5 being the best) where would you put:

The manageability of the qa?

Whether it is value for money

Is it producing a quality outcome?

Review of partnership

Partner experience

What has been your experience?

Partner expectations

What did you expect? Has it met your expectations?

Identification of critical elements of good partnership

What do you think are the 3 really important things that make a good partnership?

Clarification of partner input

In the workings of the partnership, have the roles and responsibilities changed in any way? If so, how?

Areas for improvement

If you could change two things in the whole set up, what would you change?

Benefits to partners

What have been the benefits for you in this arrangement?

Auspiced assessment interview schedule—Enterprise

This document was provided to enterprise representative/s prior to interview and used by the interviewers as a questioning and recording sheet.

Characteristics of partner

Size

Location

Industry area

Overview of core business

Impetus for collaboration (enterprise) prior to this arrangement

Antecedent conditions

How was training and assessment undertaken?

Who had responsibility for the training and assessment?

Initial reasons for seeking collaboration

Did you seek collaboration? Yes/No

What were your reasons for seeking collaboration?

Establishment

How long did it take you to form the first thought to signing the agreement?

Who was involved in the negotiations?

Organisation 1

Organisation 2

RTO

Is it a formal agreement?

If there is a formal documentation, such as a contract or memorandum of understanding, or handshake?

If there is documentation:

What was it?

Who were the signatories?

How long is the agreement meant to last for?

Drivers

Barriers

Assessment focus

Scope i.e. Qualifications/competencies

Industry area

AQF level/units

Purpose

Industry entry

Multiskilling/PD

Recognition (AQF)

Legislation

Licensing

Key features of formal arrangements

Formal documentation/Informal agreement on:

- Purpose
- Roles and responsibilities
- Access to assessments
- Information to candidates
- Information to assessors
- Processes and procedures
- Record-keeping
- Appeals/grievances
- Marketing
- Costing
- Quality assurance strategies

Skills and experience of partners

Previous experience

Were you involved in partnership arrangements before?

Developmental needs

Have you done anything since the partnership to build the skills of your people to meet the requirements of this?

Strategies for support

What strategies have you set in place to support the activities involved in the partnership? (Have you done assessor training? Computer training? Database development? Resource material development?)

Quality assurance strategies

Description of the quality assurance strategies

What you do to ensure that the assessment is OK?

Justification for the choice(s)

Why did you choose this strategy?

What are options did you think of?

Responsibility for the decision

Who decided in the end, what strategy(ies) to use?

Issues related to resource requirements including time, personnel, cost

What things did you have to put in place? Such as time, money, people

Manageability and cost-effectiveness

On a scale of 1–5 (5 being the best) where would you put:

The manageability of the qa?

Whether it is value for money

Is it producing a quality outcome?

Review of partnership

Partner experience

What has been your experience?

Partner expectations

What did you expect? Has it met your expectations?

Identification of critical elements of good partnership

What do you think are the 3 really important things that make a good partnership?

Clarification of partner input

In the workings of the partnership, have the roles and responsibilities changed in any way? If so, how?

Areas for improvement

If you could change two things in the whole set up, what would you change?

Benefits to partners

What have been the benefits for you in this arrangement?

Partnership arrangements documentation list

This document was provided to both RTO and partner representative/s prior to interview. Informants were asked to locate any documentation relating to their particular partnership arrangements. Where appropriate, copies of these were obtained by researchers.

A range of materials or documentation can help the researchers establish a 'picture' of your partnership arrangements. By reviewing a range of documentation and support materials, examples of good practice can be identified. This will assist the researchers in developing guidelines and policy for partnership arrangements.

Your assistance is sought in the provision of the following items (if possible). Don't 'panic' if you don't have any or most of these, they are just suggestions of what you might have

Agreement	This could be in the form of a: ■ Contract ■ Memorandum of understanding ■ Code of practice ■ List of roles and responsibilities
Policies	Such as: ■ Assessment policy ■ Appeals/grievances policy ■ Quality assurance policy ■ EBA agreements related to assessment outcomes
System documentation	Such as: ■ Enrolment/request for assessment form ■ Record-keeping form ■ Appeals/grievance form ■ QA checking form
Support materials	Such as: ■ Information booklet/flier ■ Assessment plans ■ Assessment instruments ■ Advice to assessors ■ Advice to candidates
Other	Any other resources, information or documents that relate to your partnership arrangement.

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Declaration of confidentiality

Interview with _____ *(insert name of organisation)* _____

I, _____ *(name)* _____, of _____ *(business address)* _____

_____

a) Undertake to keep confidential any information that comes into my possession or under my control in connection with this interview and review of documentation for the purposes of research.

b) Undertake not to reproduce in full any documents viewed or provided.

c) Undertake to ensure that the case study (and any supporting documentation) is provided to the organisation for confirmation prior to publication.

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

***ACKNOWLEDGEMENT** by Organisation being reviewed that the Declaration has been sighted.*

Signature of representative of Organisation being reviewed: _____

Name of representative of Organisation being reviewed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Key informants to the research

The key informants in this study were:

Brendan Burns	AQIS Training Services
Cheryl Disher	National Foods
Debbie Eagles	University of Ballarat
Doug Howick	Australian Environmental Pest Managers' Association
Evon Waymouth	Kilmany Family Care
Gail Morley	East Gippsland Institute of TAFE
Genevieve Kelly	East Gippsland Institute of TAFE
Helen Blennerhassett	Kilmany Family Care
John Michel	Cargill Foods Australia
Kevin Thompson	Sydney Institute of Technology
Kim Evans	Goulbourn–Ovens Institute of TAFE
Lorraine Heyes	NSW Department of Housing
Neil Trembath	Santos
Paula Irvine	Canberra Institute of Technology
Peter Meadows	Peter Meadows Consulting
Roxanne Jones	East Gippsland Institute of TAFE
Tamara Tansley	National Foods

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